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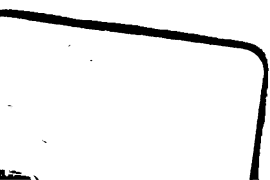
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F. J. SCHULTE & CO., PUBLISHERS,
CHICAGO.

TOOTHPICK TALES

BY

OPIE READ

Author of "A KENTUCKY COLONEL," "EMMETT BONLORE," Etc.

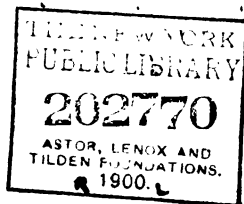


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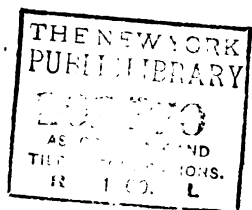
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PREFACE.

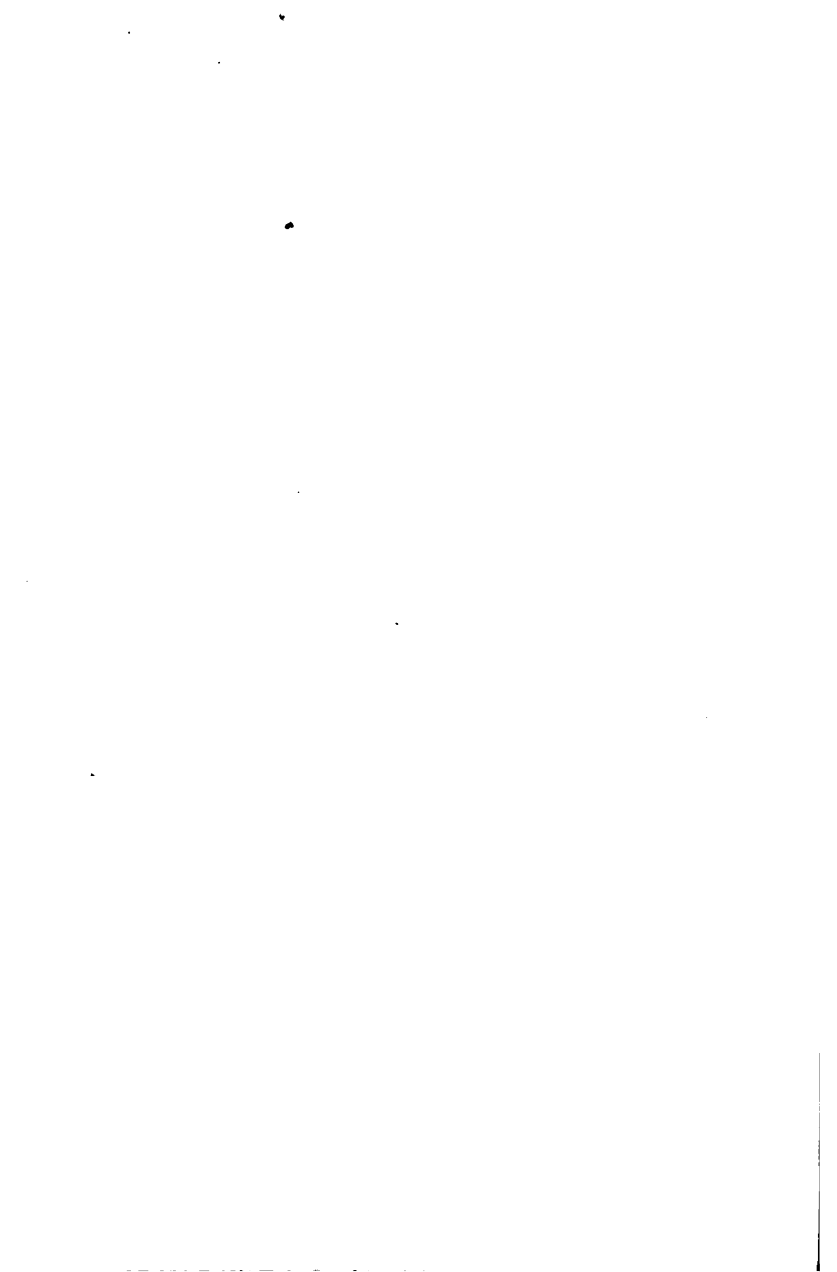
I very much regret the publication, in book form, of a number of sketches which I recently wrote for a newspaper syndicate. The sketches were never intended to be compiled into a book, and I do not regard them as a fair selection. They were not submitted to me for revision, but were hastily slammed together by an Eastern publisher and thrown out for sale. This collection of stories and sketches, brought out by my regular publishers, has been carefully made, and I hope that it may find favor with the public.

OPIE READ.

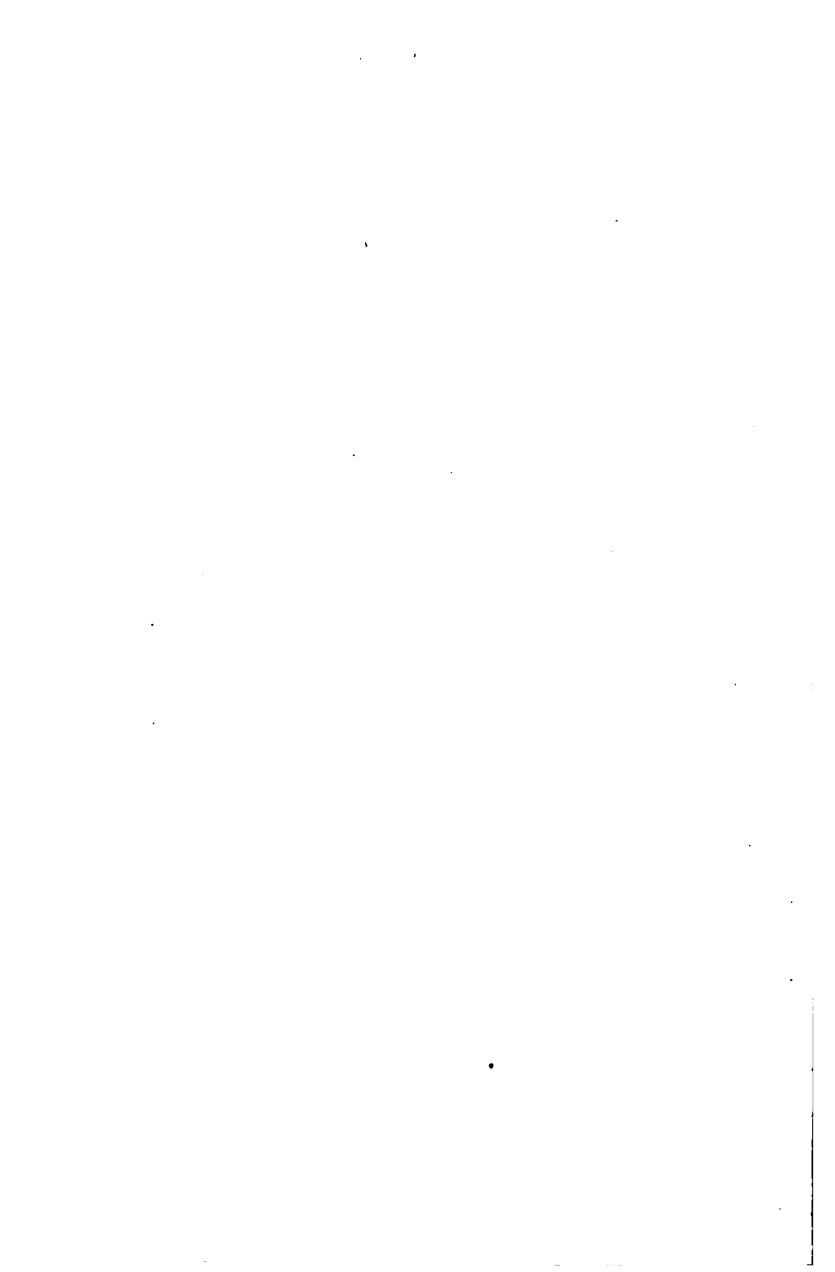


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Big Bill & Little Bill.



BIG BILL & LITTLE BILL.

BIG BILL and Little Bill were combined in the forming of a strong evidence that friendship, which is supposed to be based upon judgment, is sometimes as capricious as love, which, it is declared, has for its foundation a sort of impulsive fancy. Big Bill was almost a giant; Little Bill was almost a dwarf. They first met at a card table — or, rather, at a card cotton-bale on the Mississippi River — and, as they expressed it, hankered at once for each other's society. They became so much attached to each other that they soon decided to settle down together, and, building a cabin in Chicot County, Arkansas, they began the business of "general merchants and dealers in plantation supplies."

The very oddity of the firm was a valuable advertisement, and it is well known that negroes rode at least ten miles, Saturday afternoons, to deal with the "long an' short o' it." The sign — which read as follows: "Big Bill & Little Bill" — conveyed the only intelligence that the community had ever received with regard to their names, but, as people who live in the Mississippi River bottoms are not curious with regard to the affairs of other men, no one showed those symptoms of uneasy concern which make life in a hill-side village the fit abode of Beelzebub.

Of course, some one would occasionally ask a question something like this: "Say, did you fellers lose your other names durin' the overflow?" But about the nearest to a satisfactory reply that was ever rendered was the following answer, sometimes delivered by the giant and sometimes by the dwarf:

"Yes; you see the water riz on us so fast that we didn't have time to git out but a few of our duds, and we 'lowed that it would be better to load the boat with the most necessary artickles. We did think fur a minit ur two that it would be better to leave our dogs an' finish loadin' with our names, but then, when we recollected what fine critters they was at treein' all sorts uv varmints, we drapped our names an' gathered up the dogs."

At night the two partners would sit in a little cuddly-hole at the back end of the store, and, smoking cob pipes, would entertain each other until bedtime. Sometimes they sang songs of lively words but of most doleful tune, and sometimes they formed themselves into a sort of legislature and made speeches on the condition of the country.

Ten years at least were passed in this way, and not a difference of opinion sufficient to cause the slightest jar occurred between the partners. Some of their customers declared that so warm a friendship must come to an end; that so cheerful an agreement was against human nature; but the slow drag of time brought no jar.

One day while the two Bills were sitting in their store, waiting for customers, a woman drove up on a buckboard and asked for a drink of water; and, as

rain began to fall at that very minute, she was invited into the store. She was rather good-looking, with long black hair and the snappy quality of black eyes so much admired by river-bottom people. She was not backward in speaking of herself.

"My name is Tildy Blake," said she, "and I have come here from East Tennessee to teach school over near Fetterson's saw-mill, but I don't reckon there's much to be teach'd over there, only readin', writin' and 'rithmetic, mebby, but it's no odds to me s'long as I get my money for it, for I am a widow woman with nobody to support but myself, it is true, but a person always likes to have plenty of this world's goods, for as my husband used to say before he died — and do you know that I have been thinkin' of him for the last hour? — for he popped into my head back yonder when a razor-back hog jumped up from behind a log and made off through the woods, for po' Dan was mighty partial to razor-back hogs, 'lowin' that their meat — if you ever got any on 'em — was sweeter than other meat, but it allus took a powerful sight of co'n; but Dan — that was his name — allus had plenty, and he jest nachully tuck to the razor-backs; and when he died he left three that eat me bodatiously out of house an' home, an' then was so haungry that they broke into a neighbor's field an' caused me to be sued for slander — no, not for slander, but for damages — the slander suit come later on and finished breaking me up; so here I am, with nothin' but a few duds that air putty well worn, an' a hoss an' a buckboard. What's the name of this here firm?"

"Big Bill & Little Bill," one of the partners replied.

"What's your name?" addressing the giant.

"Big Bill."

"So I see, but what's your other name?"

"Wall, madam, it's been so long since I used it that it's too much kivered with rust to be reco'nized now."

"You're a funny man; a funny man. Have you got a name?" addressing the dwarf.

"Yes'um, I'm pleased to say I have."

"What is it?"

"Little Bill."

"Your other name. Got one, ain't you?"

"Yes'um, but I aint washed it in so long that I am 'shamed to fetch it out."

"What was your dad's name?"

"Little Buck."

"Oh, you're a funny man; a funny man. Doin' pretty well with this sto', I reckon?"

"Yes, middlin'."

"Sold anything to-day?"

"Yes, some calico an' a couple uv plow p'int's."

"Who keeps your books?"

"Aint got none."

"How do you know how you stand?"

"By lookin' 'round when we git up."

"You're a peart leetle cretur, now, aint you? Which way is it to where I want to go?"

"Straight ahead."

"One of you or both go with me; you kaint sell nothin' mo' this evening."

"Well, I don't kere ef I do," said Big Bill.

"An' I'm agreeable," Little Bill remarked. "Will your bread tray hold us?"

"Bread tray? What do you mean? It's a buck-board."

"Oh, skuze me. Failin' to see its ho'ns, I tuck it fur er doe board."

"But that don't make it a bread tray," she replied.

"Yes, it does," said Little Bill, "fur you know a bread tray ain't nothin' mo' than a dough board."

"My conshuns alive!" turning to Big Bill, "the child is gittin' pearter an' pearter. Wall, shet up yore contrapshun, an' le's go. The folks air expectin' me this month, an' I don't want 'em to wait supper."

That night, while the two partners were sitting in their cuddy-hole, Big Bill, getting up to stretch his long legs, said:

"Little Bill, she hits me as bein' a monstrous fine woman. How does she hit you?"

"Slaps me in the same way, Big Bill. When I look at them black eyes uv hern I feel like goin' out in the woods and dancin'."

"Little Bill, mebbe that's what killed her husband. Mout have danced himself to death."

"Didn't know but he mout have been cut in two by one of his razor-back hogs," Little Bill replied.

"S'pose we go out Sunday an' shine 'round a little with her."

"I'll jine you."

They called on her the next Sunday, and it was so odd a thing for the two Bills to go calling that many of the neighbors came and looked in upon them. Many attentions were bestowed upon the Widow

Blake, and especially so by a young fellow who owned a spavined horse and a buggy with red wheels; yet she seemed best pleased with the Bills. She invited them to go to church with her, which they did, and as she walked between them, no one, even the most observant-eyed old maid, could have decided upon her favorite.

That night, when the cob pipes had been lighted in the cuddy-hole, Big Bill said:

"She's gittin' better-lookin' all the time."

"Yes," replied the dwarf, "an' her eyes ain't losin' none uv their snap as you go along. Tell you what's a fact, Big Bill, I'll be hanged if I don't b'lieve I'm in love with her."

"Podner," replied Big Bill, "we air still in the same boat, fur I love her myself. Shake."

They arose and warmly shook hands.

They called on the widow again the following Sunday, and again she walked between them to church. Just before parting that evening, the two Bills held her hands, changing about from right to left so that there might be no appearance of partiality.

"Never seed a woman git better an' better-lookin' faster than she do," said Big Bill, when they reached home and lighted their pipes. "Puts me in min' uv a young deer runnin' toward you. Gits puttier as it comes near. Look here, Little Bill, tell you what I was thinkin' about. I was thinkin' that I would ax her to marry me."

"Blast me ef I wa'n't thinkin' 'bout doin' the very same caper myself."

"Say, Little Bill."

"Wall."

"We kain't both marry her."

"That's a fack," the dwarf replied, after a moment's reflection. "What air we goin' to do about it?"

"I'll be dinged if I hardly know," said the giant. "You've got mo' l'arnin' than I have, so make some surgestion."

"No, I hain't got mo' l'arnin'."

"W'y, you told me that you spelled 'way over in a book once."

"Yes, I did," replied Little Bill, "but I've dun forgot all I knowed about it."

"Wall, I never did know nothin' about it, an' a man that has knowed an' has dun forgot still knows mo' than the man that never did know."

"S'pozen we leave it to her," said Little Bill. "We've been together too long to fall out even about a putty woman, an' we'll jest 'bide by what she says."

"That strikes me about right," the giant replied.

They called on the widow the following Sunday.

"Miz Blake," said Big Bill, "we've got something we want to say to you, so s'pozen we don't go to church, fur what we've got to say must be said airter all the other folks have dun gone offen the place."

"I am allus ready to hear anything to my intrust," the widow replied. "My husband used to say that I was the patientest woman to lissen he ever seed in his life, and he used to tell me that if I could only overcome my unnat'ral dislike for razor-back hogs an' take to helpin' a little mo' 'round the mourners' bench that I would be wuth my weight in shoats, an' I recollect jest as well as if it was yistidy that a few minits befo'

his fatal pain struck him he eat a piece of ham an' 'lowed that it was the finest b'iled meat he ever eat in his life. The folks have all gone, so now what have you got to say?"

"Big Bill, wanter do the talkin'?"

"No, Little Bill, I ain't a-hurtin'. You go ahead."

"Wall, Miz Blake, it's just this," said the dwarf. "Our firm is powerful in love with you an' wants to marry you, but, knowin' under the law as she now stands that a firm kain't very well git married to one woman, w'y, we have agreed to leave it to you which one uv us to take. Big Bill thar would make you a fine husband."

"No better than Little Bill thar, an' mebbby not half as good," replied the giant.

"Wall, now, this do place me in a strait," said the widow. "I like you both jist the same, an' I don't know which one to take. I am in putty much the same fix my po' husband was in when he had to decide which razor-back hog he oughter kill when he thought jist the same of all of 'em. Big Bill, you air stronger, but, Little Bill, you air pearter. I declare I don't know which one of you to take. It won't do to run a race, fur Little Bill is the fastest, an' it won't do to rassle, fur it's a shore thing that Big Bill is the best man. How air you at poker?"

"'Bout the same," said the giant.

"Ain't a whit's difference," the dwarf agreed.

"Wall," said the widow, "there is a deck of cards here summers, and s'pozen we settle it that way."

The two men agreed, and the woman produced the cards.

They sat down, without any visible emotion, and while they were playing the widow placidly rocked herself. After a while the two men reached over and shook hands.

"Who won?" the widow asked.

"You did," replied Big Bill.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that you have got the best man — Little Bill."

"Oh, it don't make a bit of difference to me," she said. "Now, let me see. There was something I wanted to say. Oh, yes, I must know your other name, for it would be horrid to go by the name of Mrs. Little Bill."

"We won't argy about that," said the dwarf.

"Oh, yes," said the widow, "there is something else that must be settled. The firm must be broke up. No matter how friendly you all are now, there mout come a time when Big Bill, seein' how happy I am makin' you, would git dissatisfied; so one of you, it makes no difference which, must leave."

This idea met with approval, and another game of poker decided that Big Bill must leave. The next day a satisfactory settlement was made, and Big Bill, mounted on a reddish mule, rode away. His travels ceased when he reached a lonely region of Georgia, and there he settled down.

Several years elapsed, when, one evening as Big Bill was sitting on a stump by the side of a grass-grown road, a canvas-covered wagon came in sight, and, as it drew near, Bill saw the tow-heads of several children protruding from under the covering. He got up

and was on the eve of turning away, when a man ran around from the other side of the wagon.

"W'y, hello, Little Bill!" the giant exclaimed.

"Stay where you air!" said the dwarf, "fur it's all I ken do to keep from shootin' you."

"W'y, what on the face o' the yeth is the matter, my ole friend?"

"Jes' this: I b'lieve you let me win that woman on purpose."

"Tend to your business, Little Bill, an' don't talk to ever' ragtag and bobtail you meet, or I'll whale you agin. I should think two larrupin's a day is enough fur one man."

The giant, recognizing the voice, said: "Podner, I'm sorry for you, an' I wanter say that I done my best at the cards."

"Do you want her now, Big Bill?"

"Wall, no. I'm obleeged to you. Good-by."

The Same Pistol.

THE SAME PISTOL.

SOUNDS of mourning came from an old log house on a hill. I stopped near the roadside at the foot of the hill. Numerous people, seemingly dressed in their Sunday clothes, stood about the house. I stood under the shelter of the timber, lest my observation might be regarded as unfriendly espionage, for mountain people, with all their impulsive generosity, are peculiar. Especially so is the East Tennessean. A stranger who manifests the slightest interest in the East Tennessean's affairs is often looked upon with inimical, and sometimes dangerous suspicion.

While I stood gazing at the scene, a weird song, a sort of fall-of-the-year chant, arose. I knew that it was not wholly a service of religious devotion, for at times the distressing wail of a woman would rise above the chant. Suddenly I heard a groan, and, looking about, I saw a man sitting on a log. His face was buried in his hands. I approached him. He looked up with a start. His face, though young, was haggard, and his large black eyes had a hollowness of expression.

"What is going on up at the house?" I asked.

"Dan Beasley's funeral," he replied.

"He must have been quite a prominent man," I remarked.

"He wa'n't so prominent as he was noble uv natur'.

His love fur folks in general was as bright an' beautiful as a mountain sunrise."

"What did he die of?"

"A bullet."

"What! was any one so depraved as to kill so good a man?"

"Yes."

"The people have surely mobbed him?"

"No."

"Then they cannot find him?"

"They'll find him in a half hour from now."

"Then they are after him?"

"No, but he will meet the funeral procession."

"To give himself up?" I asked, in surprise.

"He won't say nothin' about that."

"You seem to know a great deal about him."

"I do. I am the man."

I looked at him in horror.

"I don't wonder that you look at me so," he said.

"There will never be another kind look turned upon me until I am dead. Then my po' old mother will look at me kindly."

"Why did you kill him?" I asked.

"I went over to a still-house tuther evenin', an' he come over atter me. I was drunk when he got thar. He came up to me mighty kind an' says, 'Sam, le's go home?'"

"'No,' says I, 'a passul uv the boys will be here putty soon, an' we are goin' to play seven-up.'"

"'You've got no money to lose,' he replied."

"'Wall, I've got as much as you have,' I said. Then he put his arm 'round me an' began to beg me."

Somehow, I got mad, for all uv a sudden it 'peared like he had always stood in my way, an' I thought ef it wa'n't for him I would be a great man. As I stood lookin' at him he smiled. I know now that it was the warm smile uv love; but then I thought it was the cold grin uv hate.

" 'Dan,' said I, 'go on away or I'll hurt you.'

" 'Sam,' he replied, 'you couldn't hurt me.'

" 'Couldn't I ?'

" 'No.'

" 'I'll show you.' I snatched out my pistol, shoved it against his breast an' fired. In a minit I was sober. I stood lookin' at him. I heard the boys comin'. I waited till they come, an' then I fell upon Dan, kissed him time an' agin, an' then ran into the woods. At first the boys was so 'stonished that they didn't follow me, but putty soon I heard them yell, an' then I knowed that if they cotch me they would hang me. I ran away an' hid in a cave, an' stayed there until jest now. I wanted to see the funeral. Dan was my twin brother."

Again he buried his face in his hands. Again the wail of a heart-broken woman arose above the melancholy chant.

"So you intend to give yourself up," I said.

"I will meet the funeral," he replied, without looking up.

"The procession is coming down the hill," I said, after a few moments' silence. He arose and stood with his arms folded. There was no hearse or wagon. The coffin was borne by four strong men. In the procession there came an old and tottering woman, leaning

on the arm of an aged man. The murderer sank upon his knees, remained for a few moments, and then stepped out into the road in front of the procession. The men who bore the coffin stopped. The murderer drew a pistol, and, exclaiming, "Mother, the same pistol!" placed the weapon to his head and fired. A heart-broken woman tottered forward and fell on the corpse.

A Goat Like Proctor's.

A COAT LIKE PROCTOR'S.

I.

IF I could truthfully say that none knew Luther Rutherford but to love him, comparative happiness would be one of my possessions. I am Luther Rutherford, which fact, you will doubtless perceive, is one of the reasons why I feel such an interest in him.

At a very early age, how early I do not know, the belief that I should preach the gospel took almost entire possession of my being. My mother encouraged the idea, for she used to tell me what great good I would accomplish when I became a feeder of the flock. She never lived to realize her hopes, and perhaps it is better as it is. I was not a strong boy, which, more than anything else, convinced my parents that I was designed for the ministry. We were very poor, living on a hill-side farm, streaked with gullies. One of my early duties was to sweep out the church, and, when my task was completed, I would often stand in the pulpit and preach to an imaginary congregation. No one seemed to think that I needed any especial training. This could not have resulted from a strong faith in my natural ability, for even in the little school I sometimes attended I was thought to be remarkably dull for a child of my years and experience. I don't know what

particular experience was meant, unless it was my custom of sweeping out the church.

My father and mother died within a few weeks of each other, and I went to live with an uncle who thought that the farm work of the present was of much more importance than the gospel work of the future. He was a great, strong, burly man, and from the first I thought that argument on my part would avail nothing. He seemed to think that my parents had died merely to punish me and that he was the administrator of the design. He never but once exhibited violence — a time when he found me lying in the hay, reading a tract pleasantly entitled “The Anguish of Torment.” He said nothing particularly, but, taking up a bridle, he gave me such proof of his non-compliance that for a while I did not know whether I had been cut in two or simply lost one of my legs. After this, my apostolic contemplation was indulged while the old fellow was asleep, but nothing could change me. I regarded myself as being persecuted, like many of the saints had been, and I took a dreary pride in it; still I was very strict in my walk and felt that a second visitation of bridle-rein and manly exertion was not to be encouraged. I succeeded in stealing much time, and, when I had reached the age of sixteen, I could read understandingly and could write a little, an accomplishment which I practiced with a goose-quill and pokeberry ink. One day, thinking that I had done quite enough work for my uncle, I went to him and said:

“Uncle, I think it is about time that I was beginning my life's work.”

"It is about time that you were doing something," said he.

"I mean, sir, that it is time that I should go out and preach the gospel."

"Preach the gospel!" he replied, indignantly.

"You've got no education. How can you preach?"

"Peter had no education either," I suggested.

"The fool's retort," replied the old man. "Do you think that you have been called?"

"Yes, sir."

"I don't believe it. Anybody that's so slow about getting up of a morning when he's called ain't apt to answer a call to preach. Maybe, though, it didn't come while you were in bed." The old man leaned on his hoe and laughed. "Preach! Why, confound your lazy skin, you'd better think about paying me for your board."

I tried to be melting in my look of reproach, but I soon felt that no mortal eye could rebuke him.

"I have done a great deal of work for you, sir," I ventured to remark.

"Yes, and have eat a devilish sight."

"I see that it is useless to talk to you. Uncle, do you ever think about dying?"

He looked up quickly and I thought his serious consideration had at last been engaged.

"Yes."

"Where do you think you'll go?"

"See that old orchard over yonder? I'll go there, I reckon."

"Your body will go there, but where will your soul go?"

"That is none of my business. Man handles the body; God handles the soul. If God don't know what to do with the soul, all right. I'd be a fool to advise Him."

"You can pray that your soul may be kept out of torment."

"Yes, I can do that, but if God thinks that torment is the right place, I ought not to have anything to say."

"There is no use in arguing with you, uncle."

"Not a bit."

"I am now old enough to take care of myself."

"All right."

"I shall leave you at once."

He accompanied me to the house. When I had taken leave of the family, he handed me a package and said:

"Open that when you are out on the road."

I shook hands with him and turned away. When I opened the package I felt like turning back and striking the old man. He had wrapped up a bar of soap.

II.

I hired myself to a farmer, agreeing to work half the time for the privilege of going to school the other half, but it seemed that the crop was always endangered or that wood must be hauled, for I don't think that during a year's time I was allowed to enjoy two months of my dearly bought privilege. At last, finding that I could interest no one in my cause, I decided

to preach anyway. The neighboring minister agreed to let me take his place for one day. This was my first thrill of genuine happiness. The fear of facing an audience could not mar the quiet joy I felt — that is, until I reached the church. Then, with a sickening sensation, I saw my uncle drive up with a wagon-load of his family. More than a year had passed since I had seen him, but, without any demonstrations of surprise or gladness, he began talking to me as though but a few hours had elapsed since we parted. Drawing me to one side, he said :

“Have you got one of them bloody sermons you used to write with pokeberries ?”.

“No, sir.”

“Glad to hear it. I brought an extra check-rein along, and I thought that if you were going to deal in red, I'd tie the horses faster.”

“I should think, sir, that your persecutions of me would cease.”

“Oh, I'm not pestering you. Preach all you want to, boy. You can't hurt anybody.”

“Uncle, I have no ill-feeling toward you, but I believe that you are a mean man. Here you are now, trying to throw obstacles in my way. If you don't want to hear me preach, you are at liberty to go away. No one, I am sure, sent you an invitation.”

“How did I know that you were going to preach ? Do you think that the whole country is excited ? I've got a right to go to church.”

I felt like knocking him down. I could now see, more than ever before, that he was a man totally unacquainted with generous impulses.

When I arose in the pulpit, my uncle, with a half smile parting his tobacco-stained lips, sat gazing at me. His wife, a woman whom I had never liked, turned up her long, keen nose, I fancied, and one of the youngsters, seeing me, exclaimed :

“ Ho, look at ole Luth ! ”

Instead of boxing his jaws, my uncle laughed. The old lady pinched the little rascal.

“ Quit that, now, ” he whined.

When I began to talk, my throat became parched, and my words were so hot that they almost burned my mouth. My ideas became confused, and, losing control of my hands, I knocked a pitcher of water off the pulpit. This would not have been so bad, but in attempting to catch the pitcher I hurled it over the audience, and, as the most aggravating of luck would have it, struck a well-known old gentleman on the top of his bald head. The blow rang out with a sharp sound, and my uncle, who had not lost sight of a single feature of the performance, leaned back and laughed, while my aunt stuffed a yellow handkerchief in her mouth and grew red in the face. The old gentleman whom I had accidentally struck with the pitcher had not seen me when I knocked the pitcher from the pulpit — as he had a habit of closing his eyes and leaning his head forward during services — and, with an exclamation which sounded rather harsh, he sprang to his feet. Some one who was sitting near him, I have since been told, whispered to him that I had thrown the pitcher to awake him.

“ You young scoundrel ! ” he shouted. “ What do you mean ? ”

"It was an accident, sir," I replied.

"Accident the thunderation! What right have you got to carry on in this way? Is that the way to preach, slinging pitchers around the house? Want to save souls by breaking heads?"

I assured him that it was an accident; that in making a gesture I had knocked the pitcher from the pulpit.

"Do you make a gesture as though you would knock down a steer? Don't you know that there should be a difference between the action of a man who is preaching and one engaged in getting out saw-logs? Come, get out of this house. I have always encouraged young preachers, but I cannot countenance a ball game in the house of the gospel. Come down, young fellow! I am in earnest."

I came down, and my uncle grinned like a wolf when I passed him. My mortification was so great that I was tempted to commit suicide, but in mentally debating as to what means of self-destruction should be employed, I found myself, almost before I was aware of it, urging the propriety of again attempting a proclamation of the sacred word. I was resolved, though, not to go back to the farmer for whom I had worked; and, without informing any one of my intention, I walked away.

III.

To follow my ups and downs — my few ups and many downs — would be to me a cheerless task, and to the reader tiresome time thrown away. At last I secured

a church in a measurably intelligent neighborhood. I had attained the age of twenty-three, and, though still awkward and gawky in my manners, yet I had picked up many points of propriety; and I think that with a good suit of store-clothes, like the smooth coat and pantaloons worn by young Proctor, one of my members, I would have been quite presentable. One Sunday, just after preaching, young Proctor came to me and said that he wanted to introduce me to a widowed lady, Sister Parkman. Of course I had no objections, and Sister Parkman was conducted forward. She was a tall woman, with just enough flesh to have the merest suggestion of a double chin. She was very much pleased to form my acquaintance, and after saying that I must call some time and see her, she put her hands on her hips and laughed. When she went away, young Proctor came to me and said:

“Mighty fine woman, Brother Rutherford. Nobody like her in this neighborhood. She's well off—got plenty of everything, and has money in the bank. Well, she deserves it all, I am sure.”

Now I was not unduly influenced by the information, but I decided to call on Sister Parkman. I found her well situated. She had a son, a glum, coarse-looking boy about fifteen years old. This boy—Simon his mother called him—did not impress me very favorably, and I thought to myself that if I ever should have anything to do with him I'd argue with him against many of the ugly peculiarities he seemed to cultivate. I don't know what caused me to think of him in this way, for I knew not how I should ever have anything to do with him. Sister Parkman was

very entertaining, and at supper she brought out a jar of pear preserves and laughingly said that kind of sweet stuff should be eaten during the honeymoon. I don't know what she meant, unless she was trying to play on the word *pear*. It wasn't long after this until I again called on Sister Parkman. She wasn't so intelligent, but she was very entertaining. Now I am going to confess the truth: I wanted to marry her, not particularly on account of any love I had for her, but because I thought that if I married her, with her easy home and liberal means, she could give me a chance of becoming a noted preacher. I do not consider that this was mercenary, for it was not for myself that I wanted the money. I could live anywhere, and it would really make no difference whether or not I would ever have a coat like young Proctor's, but I did want to buy books, and — well, a good dinner occasionally would materially help me with the great work which I had undertaken. The more I visited her, the more entertaining became Sister Parkman. She laughed so much that I thought she must be unacquainted with ill-humor; but I could not say so much for Simon. He was surly and persisted in keeping out of my way.

"Sister Parkman," said I one evening, reaching over and picking a cuckleburr from my blue-jeans breeches, "do you not sometimes feel downcast and melancholy?"

"Only of late when I git to thinkin'," she replied.

"Why are your thoughts of late so serious?"

"Speculation, brother."

"Concerning the next world?"

"No, consarnin' this one."

"I hope that money matters do not trouble you?"

"Oh, no."

She looked at me and sighed.

"Sister Parkman," said I, "you have become very dear to me."

Her eyes fell.

"Yes, and I love you very much."

We kissed each other and were soon engaged. The people of the neighborhood did not believe in long engagements, so we were married about two weeks from the time of our agreement. We had a very good dinner, and as I sat at the head of the table and looked at Proctor, I mused: "Never mind, I'll have a coat like that after awhile."

The next morning while I was walking about in the yard, Simon approached me and said:

"Wall, better ketch up your hosses."

My horses! What a pleasant sound.

"What for, Simon?"

"To go to plowin', that's what for."

"I'm not going to plow."

"Ain't you? Reckon then you'll have somebody to whup, an' we air fighters here."

Just then my wife appeared in the door. "What is the matter out there?" she asked.

"This feller won't go to work," Simon replied.

"Oh, I reckon he will."

I turned to her in astonishment. "Rutherford," she said, "none of your foolishness now. You may preach of Sundays and at night when the crop is gathered, but you must hump yourself. We can't

afford to pay rent and horse hire unless work is done. In business matters I am a plain, blunt woman. Society is one thing, business another. You understand plowin', for I have hearn you talk about workin' on the farm."

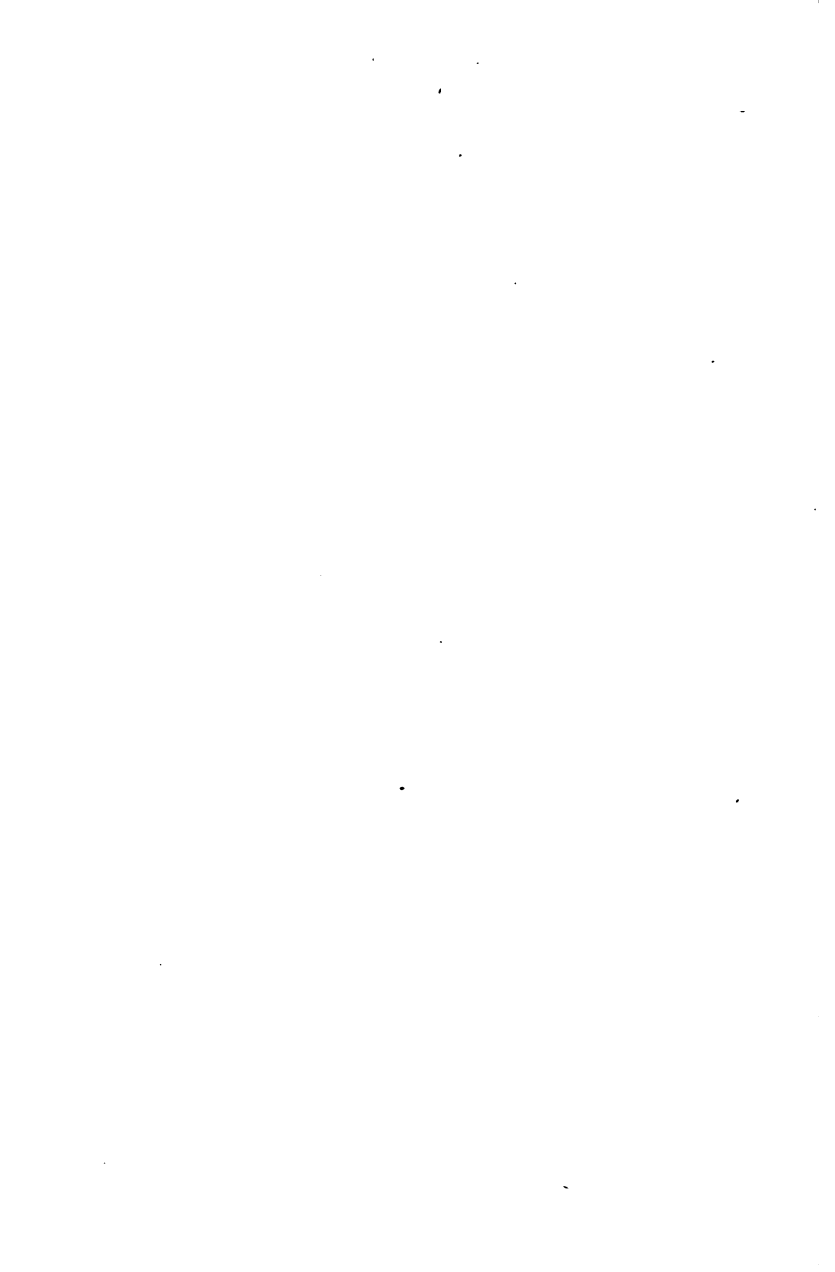
My heart sank. My bright visions were gone, and I saw no prospect of having a coat like Proctor's. Confound Proctor! I soon learned that he had deliberately set a trap and caught me in payment for a calf which he had bought of Sister Parkman. There was no alternative; I had to work. While I was plowing, some one stopped at the fence. If it wasn't my uncle I hope never to see another streak of sunlight.

"How are you getting along?" he asked.

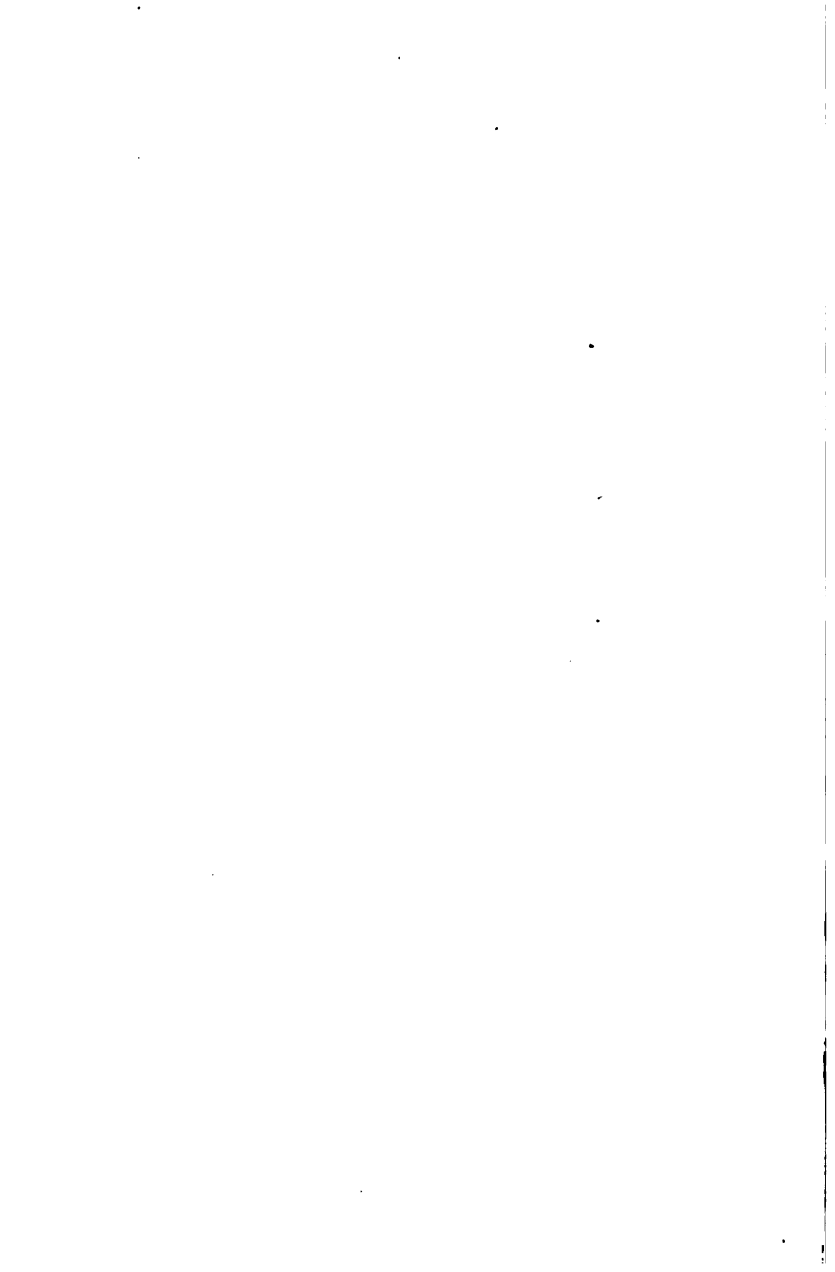
"Go on away from here," I said.

"I reckon not. I own this farm. Your wife rents it of me. I don't think you are plowing deep enough. Why don't you kill that nit-fly? He's pesterin' that horse nearly to death. I am glad you married well. You've got a mighty stirring woman, and by keeping in her good opinion you may get enough to eat. Well, so long."

My wife and Simon have gone to church and I have slipped up-stairs to work on my autobiography. I despise that boy. He struck me with a bridle yesterday. Must have gotten a cue from my uncle. I have labored here three years, and still I have not secured a coat like Proctor's. Confound Proctor!



An Arkansas Banging.



AN ARKANSAS HANGING.

SOME time ago, while reporting on the *Little Rock Gazette*, I was sent down to a place called Buck Snort to write up the hanging of a negro who had been so unfortunate as to fall within the clutches of the law. After going as far as I could by rail, I hired a horse and started across the country, intending to reach Buck Snort on the following day. Late in the afternoon, just after rounding a bend in the road, I suddenly came upon the residence of a typical planter. Tall turkeys strutted in the yard, and an excited guinea hen was declaiming her "pot rack, pot rack" epic to an audience of ducks that quacked their applause or their derision. An old man, the planter, sat on the long gallery, with his chair tipped back against the wall; and a negro boy, half grinning on the verge of a nod, was keeping the flies off him with a broad mulberry branch. It was, surely, a lazily inviting place. The cool morning-glory vines clung to strings stretched in a sort of zigzag lattice-work along the gallery, and a resplendent peony, the impudent bawd of flowers, tossed her disdainful head at a modest white rose.

I dismounted at the gate, and, advancing into the yard, called the old gentleman and asked him if I might get a drink of water from the well, a short distance away.

"Water!" he exclaimed, tipping his chair forward. "W'y, dog my cats, what do you want with water? Come up, suh; come up and have a seat."

"I have but a moment to stay," I answered, as I stepped upon the gallery.

"That's all right. Set down there," he added, pointing to a chair. "John, you son of a gun, bring a julep. Where is that infernal nigger? Ah, here he is. [The boy had not left the old man's elbow.] Fetch us a julep here — fetch two, or I'll hang yo' hide on the gate-post."

"You must really excuse me," I pleaded. "I don't care to drink anything but water, and hardly have time to drink that."

"Water!" he repeated, contemptuously. "Here you are." John brought the juleps. "Now, drink that."

"I tell you, sir, that I" —

"Drink it, or, by the Lord, there'll be trouble."

I drank it.

"Where you goin'?" the old fellow asked, when I had swallowed the liquor.

"Going over to Buck Snort to report the hanging of a negro."

"John — where is that son of a gun? If I don't hang that rascal's black hide on the fence, the devil never snorted. Here you are. Fetch us two juleps here, and that blamed quick. What are you standing there for?"

The boy was not standing, having instantly taken to his heels.

"My dear sir," I began to plead, "I can't drink anything more. I have an important" —

"Here he is," the old man broke in, as John reappeared. It seemed to me that he had a tub of julep made up, and that all he had to do was to dip it out. "Drink that. Confound it, suh, drink it."

I drank it.

"Where you goin'?"

"I told you that I was going over to Buck Snort to report the hanging of a negro."

"Damn the nigger. John — where is that scoundrel?"

"It's right yere, sah."

"Well, it's a blamed good thing, or the first thing you know you would wonder how yo' hide come on the fence. Fetch us two juleps."

"I can not drink any more," I declared, arising. "I must attend to my assignment or I shall be discharged."

"Set down there," he exclaimed, reaching over and laying hands on my "gyarments." "You set there now till I get through talkin' to you. Powerful glad you come along. Was jest a-settin' here, lookin' up an' down the road wishin' fur somebody. Wife's gone over to a sort of camp-meetin'. Don't know my wife, do you? Wall, suh, she beats any woman you ever saw — and shout! w'y, she can out-shout any woman you ever saw. Prides herself on it — it's her strong p'int. W'y, if she thought there was any woman in the country that could out-shout her, she would get up at midnight to see about it. She nearly drives me off the place sometimes when she's rehe'rsin'. Allus has to rehe'rse jest befo' a camp-meetin'. A woman come into this community from Mississippi once, and

give it out that she was the best shouter in the country. She was awful fat, an' hanged if she didn't look powerful promisin', but my wife wa'n't skeered at all, but set back and waited for the comin' of the camp-meetin'. Well, the time come, and at it they went. Fust one and then the other was on top, figertively speakin', and, nachully havin' a pride in the matter, I was a trifle oneasy till my wife raised her reserve whoop, and driv' the pretender outen the neighborhood. Where in thunder is that boy? John, didn't I tell you to bring two juleps? Let me tell you," he said, shaking his fore-finger at the boy, "by the time the sun goes down yo' hide will be out there dryin' on the fence."

John brought the juleps. "Here, drink this."

I muttered a sort of protestation, but drank the liquor.

"Where are you goin', anyhow?"

"I told you that I was going over to Buck Snort to write up the hanging of a negro."

"Let it go and stay here with me, for I tell you that my wife has gone over to a sort of a camp-meetin'."

"I can't let it go. Our paper must have an account of the hanging, and I must report it."

"Well, you stay right where you are. I'll send a nigger to report it."

"You'll do what!" I exclaimed.

"Send a nigger to report it, I tell you."

"But a negro can't report it."

"Who can't? Do you mean that Felix can't? W'y, dang yo' hide, you don't know him like I do. Ah, you are just in time."

The last sentence was addressed to the boy, who, anticipating the old man, had appeared with two more juleps. I did not protest.

"And you say Felix can't report the hangin' of a common, ordinary nigger? You don't know him. W'y, when I want a yoke of steers broke, who breaks 'em? Felix. When I want a sheep killed, who does it? Felix. Yander he is. Come here, Felix."

By that time I didn't care whether the negro was hanged or not. Felix came up to the edge of the gallery.

"Felix."

"Yas, sah."

"You know where Buck Snort is, don't you?"

"Yas, sah."

"Well, there's goin' to be a blamed nigger hung over there to-morrow, and I want you to ketch old Kit, and go over there, and come back as quick as you can and tell us all about it. Do you hear?"

"Yas, sah."

"Well, go on now."

Felix saddled old Kit and rode away, and the old man yelled something at the boy. I don't know what it was. I lost my recollection somewhere on the gallery, and did not find it until the next morning when I came down-stairs. There it lay, soiled and feverish. The old man came out bright and hearty, and insisted upon my drinking another julep, but I violently refused. My spirits had been weak, and now my heart was heavy. I had thrown away my assignment, and the voice of a crabid dismissal rang in my ears.

"Don't you fret," said the old man. "Felix will fix it all right. He'll be along after a while."

I did look forward to his coming with a sort of indefinable and groundless hope, and it seemed that he would never show himself upon the brow of the hill down the road. He came at last, and now the sight of him increased my nervousness. He turned old Kit into the stable lot, hung the saddle on the fence, in the spot, I fancied, where the planter intended to hang the boy's hide, and, slowly approaching the gallery, sat down amid an entanglement of morning-glory vines. He did not say a word—he did not look at us.

"Felix," said the old man.

"Yas, sah," he replied, looking up.

"Did you go over to Buck Snort?"

"Yas, sah."

"Did you see that blamed nigger hung?"

"Yas, sah."

"Tell us about it."

"Wall, sah," he began, getting up, "I got on ole Kit, I did, an' started off down de road, an' I ain't gone fur till yere's ole Miz Jones' steer standin' right 'cross de road. Says I, 'Whoa, Kit,' an' Kit, she whoaed. Den says I, 'Steer, oh, steer.' De steer ain't sayin' nuthin'. Says I, 'Steer, you doan know who you foolin' wid, does you?' De steer ain't sayin' nuthin'. He had er lump o' mud on de eend o' his tail, an' keep on er lashin' fust one side an' den de uder. Says I, 'Steer, oh, steer.' He ain't sayin' nuthin', but kep' on er lashin' hisse'f, fust one side an' den de uder. Says I, 'Steer, you doan know who you foolin' wid. Ef I

had er cum 'long yere yestidy an' you hader stood dar datter way, it wouder been all right, au' ef I wuster come erlong yer ter-mor' an' you wuster do diser way it would be all right, but you doan know who you foolin' wid now, steer. You foolin' wid er man dat's er 'po'tin' fur er paper.'

"De ole steer flung his tail up in de a'r an' jumped ober in de paster. I went on down de road den, I did, an' I ain't gone fur till I come ter ole man Bozel's houn' dog er standin' right in de middle o' de road, barkin' fitten ter kill hisse'f. Says I, 'Whoa, Kit,' an' Kit she whoaed. Den I says, 'Dog, oh, dog.' De dog ain't sayin' nuthin', but kep' on er barkin'. 'Dog, I mus' say dat you ain't up in de erfairs o' dis yere life. You ain't been edycated er tall.' De dog ain't sayin' er word, but kep' on er barkin'. 'Dog,' says I, 'it's all mighty well fur you ter fool wid de common run o' folks, but now you is foolin' wid er pussun dat's 'po'tin' fur er paper.' Huh. De dog jumped ober de fence an' run under de house, an' he howled might'ly, he did, too.

"Den I rid on an' finally got inter de town. Neber seed de like o' folks. I rid up ter er rack an' turned de sheriff's hoss loose an' hitched ole Kit. De sheriff's hoss didn't want ter go erway an' I boxed him side de jaw, an say, 'G'way frum yere. I's got no time ter fool wid you. I's 'po'tin' fur er paper.' De hoss he went erway, he did. Den I went ter de jail. Da had de man dar; oh, yas, da had him right dar. Says I, 'Folks, git outen de way. I's 'po'tin' fur er paper.' An' de folks got outen de way. Da had de little ole nigger in er iron cage. Yas, da did, right in er iron

cage. I nebber seed er pusson look ez bad ez he did. De skin wuz offen de wrist whar de han'cuff dun rubbed him. Den I yere clank, clank, clank. Da wuz er cuttin' de iron rings offen his ankles. 'Oh, Lawd,' he moaned, 'sabe my po' soul!' Clank, clank, clank. 'Oh, Mars Jesus, look down on dis po' ole nigger!' Clank, clank, clank. Off come de iron rings, an' den de sheriff say, 'Come on wid me. I will be jes' ez tender wid you ez I kin.' Tender wid him! Talk erbout bein' tender wid er man when you gwine put er rope roun' his naik. W'y, I kain't stan' er tight collar, an' I knows I couldn't stan' dat rope. Da tuck de man out—da led him erlong like some po' dog dat da wuz gwine kill caze he dun got too ole. Da led him up de steps o' er flatfo'm dat da had built. Yas, da had dun built one, an' says I ter myse'f, 'Whut da go ter so much 'spense fur, jest ter kill one po' ole nigger?' When he stood up on de flatfo'm, he look up, he did, an' say, 'Oh, Lawd!' Er ole 'oman ober in de cornder o' de fence, she say, 'Oh, Lawd!' 'I's wid you, honey,' says I. 'Oh, Lawd,' says her ole man, ober in ernuder cornder. 'I's wid you, too,' says I. De sheriff he axed de ole nigger ef he had anything ter say, an' he said no, but jest ez de sheriff had put on de black cap, de nigger shuddered in de darkness, an' says :

" 'Take off de cap jest er minit, Mr. Sheriff.'

" Mr. Sheriff he tuck it off; an' den de nigger looked up at de sun an' didn't say nuthin' fer er little while. Den he says: 'Dar's dat sun gwine erlong up dar—gwine erlong—gwine erlong. It has allus been gwine erlong, an' it always will be gwine erlong,

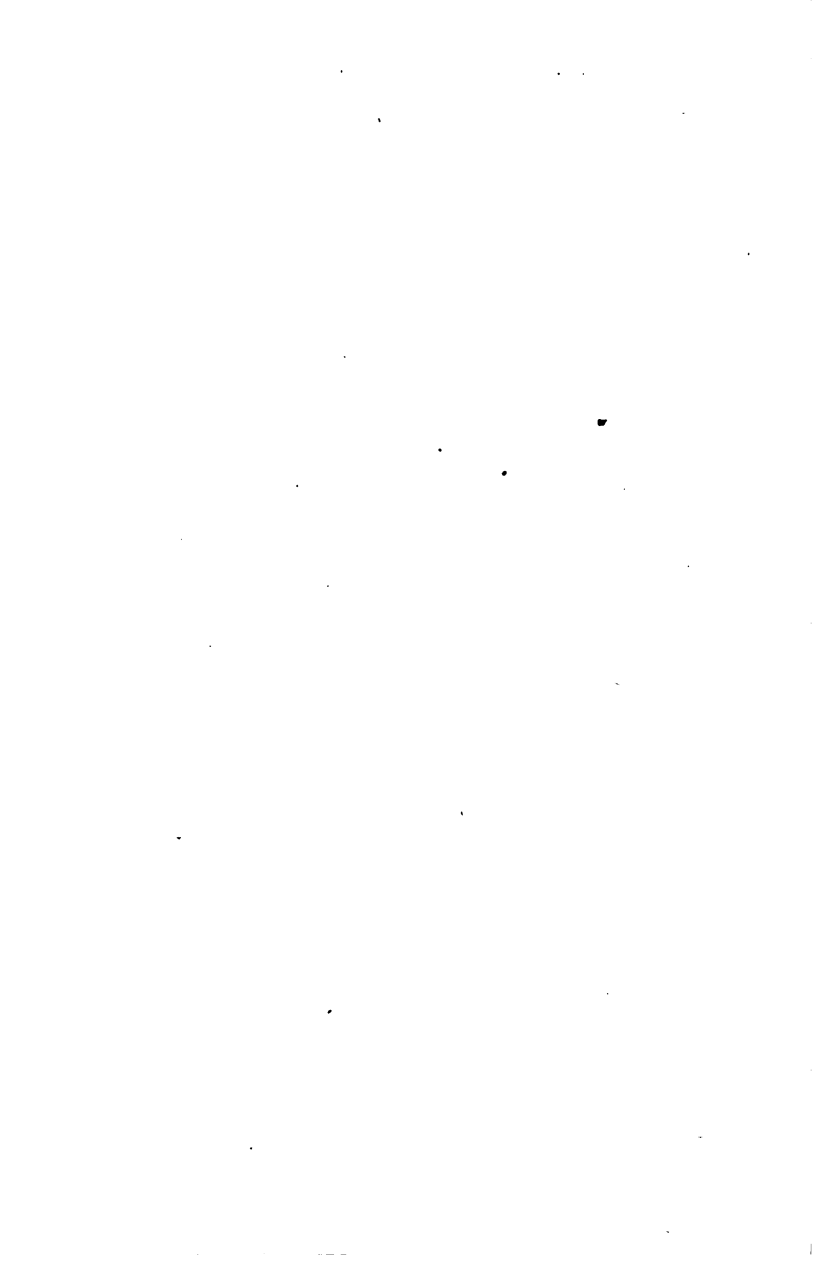
but whar will I be when dat sun is gwine erlong tomorrow? Dat sun wuz gwine erlong jest the same way long time ergo, when I wuz er little boy, out in de fiel', settin' up in de cornder o' de fence under de elder-bushes by de water-jug, whar de dog lay er hittin' de groun' wid his tail wheneber I spoke to him, an' it wuz gwine 'long jes' de same when I wuz er plowin' in de fiel' atter I got big ernuff, an' I uster wonder ef it wuz de gre't eye o' de Lawd er lookin' down at me. One ebenin' when de gre't eye o' de Lawd dun gone down behin' de hill, I stood at de do' o' de laug meetin'-house, wipin' de'tears outen my eyes. Suthin' — it mout er been de gre't eye o' de Lawd — tole me dat I wuz er sinner man, an' I had knelt down at de mo'ners' bench an' de Speret had dun whispered dat my sins wuz wiped out. Peace wuz in my soul, an' I stood dar listenin'. ter de glad shouts o' de folks inside and ter de whipperwill down in de bottom. I went home wid dat same peace in my soul, an' de next mawnin' when I went out ter plow de gre't eye o' de Lawd looked brighter den it had eber done, an' de dew-drops in de bud o' de young co'n 'peared like specks o' de gre't eye dun drapped off down in dar. I wuz er singin' er glad song when er man come out in de fiel' an' 'gunter talk ter me. I wuz so happy at fust dat I didn't know whut he wuz er sayin', but finally I understood dat he 'cused me o' stealin' his money. De Lawd knows dat I neber did take er cent o' his money, but he kep' on er 'cusin' me, an' at las' he grabbed er holt o' me, an' den ole Satan he entered in, an' I snatched up er hoe dat lay dar an' chopped him on de head wid it. Dead! He lay dar, dead, an'

his blood run out aroun' er hill o' co'n, an' de gre't eye o' de Lawd drawed de blood up. I stood dar shakin' like er man wid er chill, an' I roamed roun', I doan know whar, till at las' Mr. Sheriff he come an' say he wanted me, an' now, yere I is, an' dar is de gre't eye o' de Lawd still gwine on. Put on de cap, Mr. Sheriff.'

"Den Mr. Sheriff he put on de cap, an' de fust thing I knowed — *flip*. De man wuz down dar, an' de fuzz stood out all up an' down de rope. 'Git outen de way, folks,' says I; 'git outen de way, 'caze I's done 'po'tin' fur dis yere paper.' An' de folks got outen de way, an' I got on ole Kit, I did, an' I come on erway ez fast ez I could, an' dat wuz peart, 'caze ole Kit didn't want ter 'po't fur dat paper no mo' nuther, an lemme tell you, Mars' John, I'll break de steers fur you, an' git de hogs out frum under de fence, an' mend de wagin tongue, an' all dat, but lemme tell you, I ain't gwine 'po't fur no mo' paper."

His report, just as he had given it to me, appeared in the *Gazette*, and I was not discharged.

"Run Along, Now!"



“ RUN ALONG, NOW ! ”

THE evening was bitter cold. Two children—a boy with a manly face and an expression of matured concern, as though some one had ever been dependent on him, and a pale-faced little girl—wandered about the streets of a Western city. They had been left by an immigrant train, having fallen asleep in the barn-like waiting-room, and, owing to the hurry incident upon the departure, no one thought of them. They begged the station-keeper to allow them to remain by the fire, but he discredited their story—declared that they had not been left by a train; that they had been in the city, and were “hanging around” to steal something. Everybody hurried along. No one had a kind look for the waifs. They went into the warm corridor of a hotel, but a man said :

“Run along, now. You don’t want to be stopping here.”

“We are nearly frozen,” the boy replied, “and we want to get warm.”

“Children ought to be at home such weather as this. Your mother ought to know better than to send you out.”

“Our mother is dead, sir. She died two weeks ago, and we came away with people who are going south where it’s warm, but the train has left us, and the man won’t let us stay in the depot.”

"Very good story, young fellow; but run along home. Parents that would send their children out to beg such weather as this should be punished."

"We are not begging."

"Run along with you." And he opened the door, and they passed out into the cutting wind. The fierce blast seemed to blow the darkness close up to the lamps; the tired teams seemed to blow chilling mists from their nostrils; and the heavy wagon-wheels seemed to sink deep into the darkness and pulverize the gloom. The children went into a drug-store.

"Run along there."

They went into a restaurant.

"Run along there."

They went into a saloon, where merry revelers sang wild songs, and where the maudlin man dropped a tear into his glass.

"Run along there," said the bartender. "This is no place for children."

"Let us warm ourselves," implored the boy, and he repeated his story.

"That's all very well, young man, but haven't I seen you around the streets begging many a time?"

"No, sir."

"I think I have. I'll bet you haven't taken no less than ten dollars home to-day. Run along."

Again they were in the freezing gloom.

"Oh, where will we wake in the morning?" came from the saloon and died on the air as the boy and his sister turned a corner.

"Don't cry, my little pet."

"I'm so cold."

"Yes, but we may find some place. Let us go back to the depot, and maybe we can get on a train."

They wandered around in the blinding sleet.

"We are a long time getting there," said the girl.

"I believe we are lost," the brother replied. "Let us turn in here." And they went into a narrow alley and crouched down by a wall.

Ah, Mr. Humanity, because you have sometimes shown pity and afterward found that it was ill-bestowed, you have hardened your heart.

Ah, Mr. Churchman, whose knees press the soft velvet at the time of prayer; you who see suffering with dry eyes and read with moisture the "simple annals of the poor," scratch from your Bibles the heart-warming sentence, "Suffer little children to come unto me"—scratch it out, or you are a hypocrite.

"If I could smell the blossoms by the porch, I wouldn't be so cold," said the little girl.

"It will be a long time before they bloom again, my little pet."

"Will this cold weather kill the tree?"

"No, but it will be a long time before the summer comes."

"Can people in heaven look down and see the people on the earth?"

"Yes, I think so."

"I wish they couldn't."

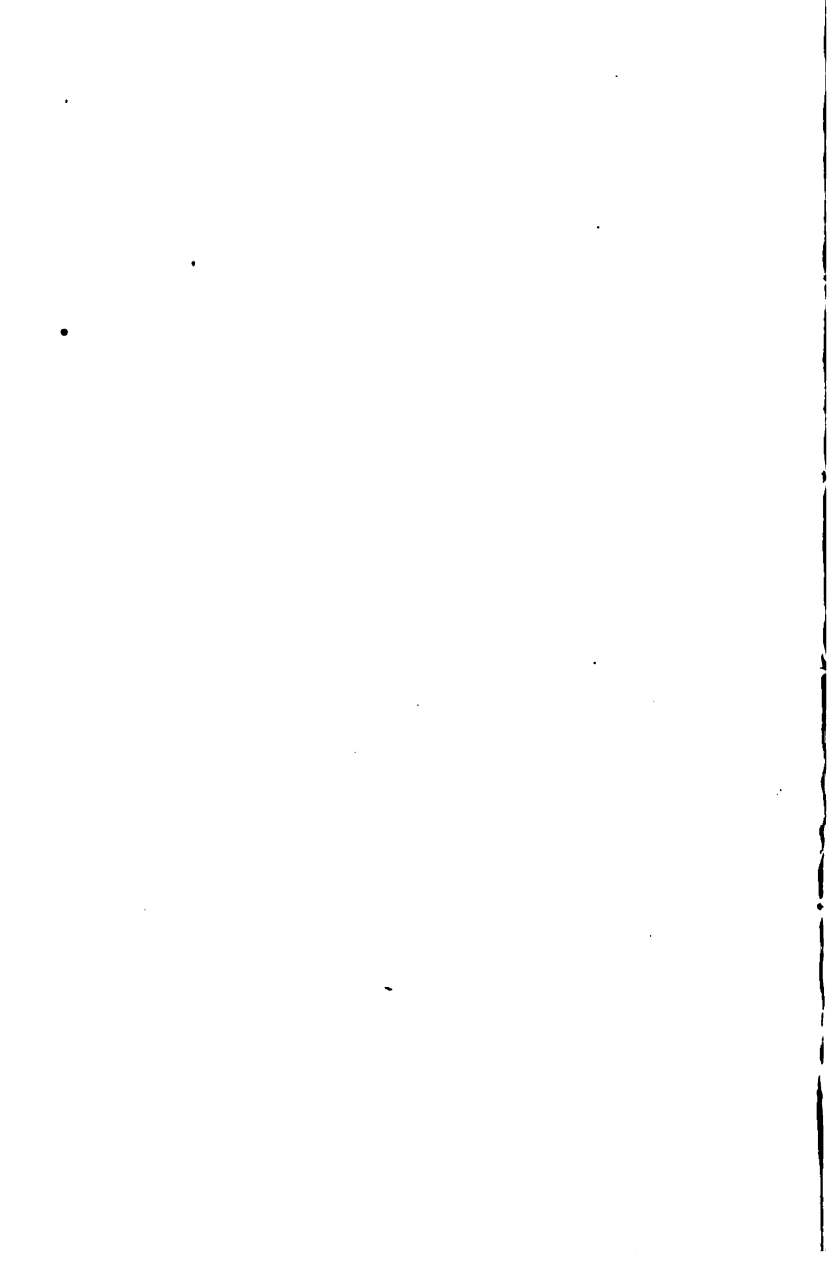
"Why, pet?"

"Because, if mamma looks down and sees us, she wouldn't be happy any more."

He drew her closer to him. The neighbors' lights

went out one by one. The sleet seemed to be conquering everything. The dog that had barked over on the hill was silent. A cheerless, freezing morning broke in. In an alley sat two rigid forms. The boy was in his shirt sleeves. He had put his tattered jacket around his little sister, and both were dead.

There Was a Fool.



THERE WAS A FOOL.

I.

"YOU'RE a fine-lookin' specimen to be axin' fur a wife, ain't you? Hah, ain't you? W'y, dog my ugly cats, ef it don't seem that the less account a young feller is these days the more he's on the lookout for a wife."

Old Nat Banks lived on Big Terrapin Creek. Had he been as much noted for industry as he was noted on account of a disposition to dodge active work, he would have taken a position in the front rank of Terrapin Creek agriculture, but, as it was, he occupied the unenvied position of crop thermometer — that is, when he had a fair crop, it was generally believed that all of the other crops in the neighborhood were of unusual excellence. Old Nat was a widower. It was once cruelly hinted at Webster's watermill that Mrs. Banks had been starved to death, but the inhumanity of this reproach will be recognized when I solemnly affirm that the old lady, on the day before she was stricken with her fatal illness, was seen fondly hovering over a large stew-pan full of cold potatoes and wild mustard. Old Banks' daughter, a girl of seventeen, would have been the belle of the community had her father's farm been in better condition. In opposition to the advice of people more intelligent than himself, he had burdened

the girl with the name of Anthracite. He had heard the word, in a vague sort of way, and was much struck with it, declaring that a girl with such a name could not help marrying a lawyer, or a circuit rider with a good nag and a new saddle. Bill-Dick Belsher, a sort of "harum-scarum" young fellow of the neighborhood, had fallen in love with Anthracite, and had asked her to marry him, which, as there was nothing better in sight, she had consented to do. Bill-Dick, dressed in a suit of corduroy — which, indeed, was the wardrobe wonder of nearly every young man in the community — had called at the house and asked for the girl, when the old man denounced him, as above set forth.

"Oh," the old man continued, "I know all about your clothes, but you don't know nothin' about law, an', besides that, whar's your nag an' new saddle? Anthracite kain't afford to throw herself away on a common man, 'specially one that ain't no more account than you air, Bill-Dick Belsher."

"You are a fine man," Bill-Dick replied, "to be talkin' 'bout a pusson bein' no account. W'y, cad-found your ugly pictur', Nat Banks, you are too lazy to bresh a hoss-fly offen your nose in August, an' you ain't more'n got sense enough to grunt when a pain strikes you. Mout live two hundred years, Nat Banks, an' you couldn't have a suit of clothes like these here."

"You wouldn't have 'em ef you hadn't found 'em summers," the old man replied; "but that ain't nuther here nur thar; you ain't goin' to marry Anthry, an' that clinches it."

"S'pose we run away?"

"S'pose I foller you?"

"S'pose you kain't ketch us?"

"S'pose lead ken?"

The reference to lead had its effect. "Come, old man," said Bill-Dick, "don't come talkin' about shootin' a feller."

"Ain't said a word about shootin'."

"No, but cadfound your ugly pictur', that's whut you meant. You must recolleck you ain't got more'n enough sense than to shoot these clothes full of holes."

"Wall, then, go on away, an' find a man that won't shoot, an' marry his gal. That's about the safest way for you to do."

"Never mind, old man; I'll git even with you."

"Yes, the turkey gobbler got even with the mus'-rat."

"An'," said Bill-Dick, "mebbe the coon didn't get even with the crawfish."

"He mout a done it," replied the old man, "but he got his skin powerful wet."

"That's all right, but he eat the crawfish. Well, I must go, but I'll see you agin."

Several weeks later, during an overflow, Bill-Dick hurriedly sought the old man and excitedly exclaimed: "Say, Mr. Banks, I don't kere how much I've got agin a man, I kain't b'ar to see his dumb brutes suffer. Three of the best hogs you've got air out on an islan' in the creek, an' ef you don't go airtter 'em the water'll sweep 'em off in another ha'f hour."

"My stairs, you don't say so, Bill-Dick!"

"Didn't you hear me say so? Ef you didn't I'll say it agin."

"Of cou'se I hearn you, but what am I to do?"

"Go airtter 'em."

"How?"

"I've got a boat down yander."

"Will you let me take it?"

"I'll go out with you."

While they were rowing toward the island, Bill-Dick said: "Old man, you mout let me have Anthry, airtter I have dun been so 'commerdatin'?"

"Bill-Dick, whar's your nag an' new saddle? Whar's your law books? Bein' 'commerdatin' is one thing, an' givin' up a gal is another."

"Hop out," said Bill-Dick, when the boat touched the island. The old man jumped out, and Bill-Dick, shoving off into deep water, caught hold of a sapling to hold the boat steady, and said:

"How do you feel, old man?"

"All right. Say, row her in, an' le's git the hogs. Come on, for the water is risin' powerful fast."

"What hogs?"

"W'y, dog my cats, my hogs—the ones you said was out here."

"Old man, you ain't got no hogs out here. I was jest a-jokin' with you."

"That ain't no way to joke, Billie. Come up an' let me git back into the boat."

"No, I reckon you'll have to swim out."

"W'y, man, I kain't swim a lick."

"Then I reckon it'll far' bad with you. Good-by."

"For ther Law's sake, hold on, Billy."

"Would, but you see I ain't got time. Got to go an' marry a gal that'll soon be a orfun."

"Wush I had my gun," said the old man.

"Stay here till I fetch it."

"Blame your infernal lyin' hide, I could shoot the top of your head off."

"Blaze away."

"Never mind. I'll git you yit, Bill-Dick."

"Not in this here world. Say, do you obsarve how peart the water is risin'?"

"Oh, Lawd!" supplicated the old man, "whut am I to do?"

"Ride out on your nag and new saddle," replied Bill-Dick.

"You blame lunatic, don't you see I ain't got none."

"Then float out on your law books."

"Come, now, Billie, would you see your ole friend — a friend that nussed you when you was a little boy — drowned this way?"

"No, Uncle Nat."

"Thar, now, I didn't think you would, Billie."

"I couldn't stand to see you drowned, so I'll go away so I kain't see it."

"Oh, you wretch!" the old man howled, "you oughter be dead."

"You will be putty soon."

"W'y, you pore fool, don't you know that Anthry wouldn't marry a man that has drowneded her pore, hard-workin' father?"

"I'll tell her that you fell in the water."

"She won't believe you."

"Yes, she will, fur I've dun told her that I wouldn't be s'prised if you didn't fall in."

"Oh, you unfeelin' wretch."

"Yes, that's whut the circuit-rider said."

"You ain't got no more soul than a buffalo-gnat, Bill-Dick."

"That's whut the lawyer said."

"Hold on thar, now!" Bill-Dick had begun to row away. "Say, Billie."

"Wall."

"Tell you whut I'll do."

"Nominate your pizen."

"You know that I have had my eye on your sister Tildy for some time."

"Which eye?"

"Blame it, both of 'em."

"Wall, whut ef you have?"

"W'y, jist this: Ef you'll git her to marry me, I'll give you Anthry."

Bill-Dick hesitated a moment and then replied:

"All right."

"Shore pop?" asked the old man.

"Shore pop," Bill-Dick replied.

II.

Old Miss Tildy lived with her brother. She was a "finiky" old maid, with a wisp of hair that resembled a bunch of sedge grass. She was such an enemy to man in general that Bill-Dick, as he walked toward home, regretted that he had not exacted easier terms from old Banks. When he entered the house old Miss

Tildy was putting a plate full of corn-bread on the table.

"Jist in time," she said. "Fetch up a cheer."

Bill-Dick sat down, wondering how he should proceed. "Tildy," said he, "I hearn a man compliment you mighty high to-day."

"Who was it?" she eagerly asked.

"One of the nicest gentlemen in this country; Mr. Nat Banks."

"He's an old fool!" she snapped. "I hate him, an' he better not fool 'round me."

"Oughtn't talk that way, sis."

"Yes, I will talk that way, an' more'n that, he better never come whar I am. I'd throw b'ilin' water on him in a minit."

Bill-Dick's heart sank, and, deep in his soul, he cursed himself for making such a contract with old Banks. Now his last chance was gone, for he knew that never again could he place the watchful fellow under such contribution. Suddenly an encouraging idea occurred to him.

"Tildy," said he, assuming an air of most complete satisfaction, "you don't know how much good your words have done me. I hate old Banks, an' when I heard that he was in love with you it made my blood bile."

"Who said he was in love with me?" she asked.

"Oh, it's talked all around. I would like to ketch the old wretch here."

"Wall, now, as to that, brother Bill-Dick, I'm free, white an' twenty-one, an' I'm the person to say who shall come to see me, I reckon."

"He shaint come on the place, I tell you."

"Wall, now, brother Bill-Dick, this place is as much mine as it is yourn, an' I've got some say-so."

"Ef I ketch him here I'll shoot him!" Bill-Dick exclaimed. She jumped up from the table and slammed the door as she went out.

After dinner Bill-Dick went over to see old Banks. "Now, old man," said he, "you've got to work this thing sly. You must slip over when I ain't thar, an' git out when you see me comin'. Airter while you an' her ken slip off an' git married. How does that fit you?"

"Like a suit of corduroy!" the old man joyously exclaimed.

"Now, I reckon I ken see Anthry, kain't I?"

"Not now, Billie. Wait till I am married. Don't act foolish," he continued, noticing the frown on Bill-Dick's face. "Recolleck that I won nearly a ha'f a beef when I went to the last shootin'-match."

"Wall, then, old feller, you'd better commence to cut your capers right at once. Tildy might be skittish at fust, but 'pear to be skeered of me, an' she'll be your friend."

That afternoon the old man went over to see Miss Tildy. "What do you want here?" she demanded, when he appeared at the gate.

"Oh, nothin' in particuler. My stars, you've got the puttiest chance of flowers I ever seen. Who takes kere of them?"

"I do."

"You are monstrous smart. You sartinly don't work

in the sun with them putty — excuse me — han's of yourn."

"Say, Mr. Banks, brother Bill-Dick don't want you to come here."

"So I've hearn, but it rests with you. Yander he comes now, an' I reckon I'd better mosey. Mout I come over some time?"

"You mout," she replied.

Bill-Dick pretended to be furious. "I seen the old scoundrel," he angrily declared, "an' I wush he'd a waited till I got here. B'lieve I'll take my gun an' go over an' shoot him."

"You'll not do no sich of a thing. It's none of your business if he does come here, fur he ain't a-pinchin' you, I reckon."

"But great Lawd, Tildy, you ain't thinkin' of marryin' of him, I hope. I don't kere," Bill-Dick continued, "if his uncle did die last week an' leave him a lot of money; I don't want to mix with him as a brother-in-law."

"But you'd like mighty well to mix with him as a son-in-law," Miss Tildy replied with a sharp snap.

"No, I wouldn't, no such thing. I did go to see his girl for a while, but she's too common for me."

"Bill-Dick, you neenter think that a suit of corduroy clothes is ever'thing in the world that a person could wish fur. The governor of Arkansaw, I don't 'low, has got a stitch of corduroy."

"A good many folks think so, or they wouldn't vote for him," Bill-Dick responded. "But that ain't nuthin' here nur thar, Tildy. Pap allus 'lowed that thar was a fool summers in the family, an' now my ad-

vice to you is not to let it turn out to be you. I've put a fresh load of buckshot in my gun, an' ef I ketch old Step-an'-Fetchet hereagin thar'll be a hide summerson Terrapin Creek that won't hold shucks."

Bill-Dick strolled away, and, by previous arrangement, met the old man.

"Gittin' along fust-rate, I see, old man."

"Fine as a fiddle, Billie."

"When you think you'll tote her off?"

"'Bout Tuesday, I think."

"Then I'll be airter Anthry early Wednesday mornin'."

"All right."

"Have you told her about it?"

"Oh, yes; explained it up to the handle," the old man replied.

"How does she stand the siparation from me?"

"Fust-rate—hil' up by a strong hope, you know."

"Better come 'round agin tomorrer evenin'."

The old man went the next evening, and found Miss Tildy watering her flowers.

"Fine evenin', Miss Tildy."

"Mighty fine."

"Whar's Bill-Dick?"

"Don't know. Do you want to see him?"

"Good Lawd, no. Me an' him ain't geein' so mighty well."

"Whut's the trouble?" she asked.

"Won't git mad if I tell you?"

"No."

"Wall, he 'lows that I think too much of you."

"That ain't none of his business, Mr. Banks."

"I was afeard that it was, Miss Tildy, but if you say it ain't, w'y, she pops; that's all. May I come in?"

"Sartinly."

They sat on the door-step and held a long and earnest conversation. "I must go," he at length said. "I am afeard he'll ketch me here."

"You'll be on time shore Tuesday night, will you?" she anxiously asked.

"As shore's shootin's dang'us," he replied.

He had been gone but a few moments when Bill-Dick came.

"That old fool been here?" he asked.

"No old fool ain't been here," she replied.

"Wall, it's a good thing he haint. Neenter think because he's got a little money now that he can run the whole neighborhood. Recollect that pap said thar was a fool summers in the fam'ly, an' try an' not let it be you."

"Take kere of yourself, Bill-Dick, an' I'll try an' come out all right. I notice that them that's allus a frettin' about somebody else is mighty apt to have somethin' wrong about themselves."

"Wall, we won't jower, Tildy. By the way, Tildy, thar's goin' to be a sort of shindig over at Milliken's Tuesday night, an' I'd like for you to go over with me."

"I've dun quit goin' to shindigs."

"You went to one last week."

"But I've quit sence then."

When Bill-Dick went into his own room, he fell on his bed and kicked up his heels. "Oh," said he,

"the Lawd intends some folks for one think an' some fur another. I oughter be a lawyer, an' dog my buttons if I don't b'lieve I'll skeer up a law book summers an' strike out. Bet I be a jedge in less'n six months. Some feller would say, 'Good mornin', Jedge William-Dickson, how is your honor's good health,' an' I'd make my neck stiff like it had a crick in it, an' ahem, hem, hem, a time or two, an' tell him, 'Fa'r to middlin'."

Bill-Dick remained away from home until a late hour Tuesday evening, in order, as he mused, "to give the foolish young couple every opportunity." When he arrived at home the house was deserted. His sister's trunk and bandboxes were gone, and again he fell on the bed and kicked up his heels. The night, to him, trod away with lead-weighted feet. Fifty times or more did he get up and look out, anxiously hoping to see a streak of daylight stealing through the woods. At last daylight came, and, waiting until the sun came up out of the distant creek bottoms, he joyously set out for the house of his new brother-in-law. The old man met him at the gate.

"Good mornin', Billie."

"Good mornin'. Is Anthry up yit?"

"Don't know. Say, Billie, Tildy wants to know ef you won't furgive her an', lemme see, thar's something else I wanted to say. Oh yes, Anthry went over to visit her Aunt Mag last week an' while thar—now don't cavort, Billie—while thar she married Lit Sarver, the circuit rider."

"You infernal old wolf!"

“Hold on, Billie; don’t cavort. Recollect that I won beef at a shootin’-match tuther week. What a pity that you didn’t have a nag an’ new saddle. I mout have give you one, but I’ve had so much trouble with my hogs lately.”

Bill-Dick sat down on a bench, and after a few moments of deep meditation said: “Pap allus said thar was a fool in the fam’ly, an’ I’ll be blamed if it haint hit on me.”



The Road to the Mire.



THE ROAD TO THE MIRE.

A MANUSCRIPT came into my possession some time ago, and the propriety or impropriety of publishing it has caused me a deal of perplexing speculation; not that there is anything in it to corrupt even a thoughtless reader, but for the reason that some of its details are shocking. However, I have overcome every scruple against its publication, and now give it over to the promulgation of the printer:

Every one who knew me during my earlier life must have regarded me as a truthful man. My name is Robert Wexford and I was born in a little town in Southern Missouri, long before Chicago had become a great and — I sometimes fancy — an aching nerve center. I was not bright as a boy, and, growing up too rapidly, my father said, was rather a dull young man. The girls who visited my sister were disposed to make sport of me, and when they were gone, after poking fun at me, I used to go angrily to my room and curse myself. Indeed, I was so far from being sharp that I was known in the town as Blunt Wexford. I left the town and began clerking in a dry-goods store in Southern Illinois, and, although I was dull, I succeeded, for, having no intellectual quality to build a hope on, I depended wholly upon my industry. From time to

time I was advanced, until I occupied a position of trust. Finally the firm moved to Chicago, and, five years later, I was a member of the company. Although I was prosperous and in a fair way to become rich, I was not contented with myself, for I was still dull in conversation, and no one cared to cultivate me. I read a great deal, but it didn't seem to do me any good, for whenever I attempted to impart any information which I might be possessed of, I spluttered and then gave up in embarrassment. I boarded at a private house and with an intelligent family, but, despite daily association, I could never feel free to say anything, through fear of breaking down. By some means, I hardly know how, I got acquainted with a young woman named Amy Berry. The first time I really felt an interest in her was one evening when, bolder than usual, I attempted to tell a humorous story — surely a delicate undertaking even for bright men. I failed, but Miss Berry did not laugh when I forgot the point of the story and began awkwardly to flounder about in search of it, neither did she show that sympathy which is almost as crushing and far more humiliating in its effect than ridicule. In fact, I don't exactly know what she did, but I know that afterward I had a warm regard for her. She was a beautiful girl, and I heard a smart man say that she was charming in conversation. She came to the house quite frequently, and the first thing I knew I was in love with her. This was a desperate situation: a dull man in love with a spirited talker; and I tried to drive all thoughts of her out of my head and, of course, failed. In many things men may control their minds, but I don't think any man

has ever succeeded in driving away the image of a beautiful woman. I don't know that I had hopes of winning her, and yet I constantly tortured myself by seeking her society, although I could say nothing to interest her.

One day I was suddenly taken with inflammatory rheumatism. The pain was so severe that the doctor gave me a dose of morphine. The effect was delightful; my mind became strangely clear, and thoughts sharp-cut and fancies neatly trimmed flew through my brain. The rheumatism soon passed away, and I had no further need of the drug, but I could not forget its entrancing effect. An idea of conquest occurred to me. I would take a dose and call on Miss Berry. I did so. So soon as I entered the room, the young lady pleasantly remarked that she had never seen me looking so well.

"And you have never seen me feeling so well," I answered, seating myself and contemplating my own ease of manner.

"I don't know how well it is your custom to feel," said she, "but I do know that I have never before seen you appear so well."

"And it was because you have never until this moment seen my real self. I have been hampered by mind-darkening embarrassments, and a tongue too cowardly to assert itself. In fact, I have been a fool."

"Oh, no," she laughed, "not a fool, but a sufferer from lack of confidence in self."

"But," I interposed, "who but the fool is given to such suffering? It is well enough, and doubtless commendable, for every man to place a modest estimate

upon himself, but it is cowardly to stand in fear of himself. I am pleased to say that I have broken away from a foolish slavery."

"I can hardly understand you," she said. "I can see that a great change has come over you, but I can't determine its cause. It is wonderful!"

"Any change from my former condition would be wonderful, and no change could fail to bring a certain sort of pleasure."

She sat continuing to look at me in astonishment. I asked her if she had not been out of town, and she answered that she had just returned from a visit to the country. The month was June, and she spoke of the charm of the woods.

"The man who loves not the woods would seek to crucify a god," I replied. "Poetry and soul do not demand that we shall live there, but they do enforce a reverence and a love for the grandeur of a tree and the beauty of a flower that seems to have stolen away from the gaze of the vulgar. The city roars a groan, but the leaves sweetly murmur; we chase a dollar along the sidewalk, but in the deep heaven of the woods we feel the presence of God."

"But you must remember," she rejoined, "that sometimes there are thieves in the woods, not chasing a dollar, but burying it."

"True, but they are made better by going into the woods. There is more religion in a bird's nest, in a shade sanctified by pure air, than there is in a thousand churches; there is more of the praise of God in the song of one bird than there is in a million human hallelujahs."

We continued to talk until the clock struck eleven, and when I arose to go she said:

"Do please sit down. Let the clock strike; let time pass. I was never so entertained, and I am afraid that I might never find you in so fine a frame of mind again."

I assured her that I had mastered myself, and I felt that I had, and bade her good night.

My dreams were pleasant, but when I awoke at morning I had a dull headache. I thought with a thrill of the night before, but then, and with a shudder, too, I felt that I had lost the intellectual mastery of myself; and if there were any uncertainty on this point, it was settled soon after I went downstairs, for at breakfast I attempted to say something pleasant and ashamedly failed. I felt depressed, almost crushed during the day, and, just before going home, took more morphine. Miss Berry dined with us that evening, and while I was walking home with her, she said:

"I am glad to see that you are still master of yourself, and how fortunate it is, for you are too well read a man to be hampered by any sort of embarrassment."

I repeated my former declaration, that I should never be in slavery again, and then flew off into a whirl of panegyrics on the beauty of the night,

"Oh, how thrilling with surprises you are," she said, when we arrived at her father's door. "I have never seen any one who so perfectly understands the art of holding interest. You know that to hold a woman's interest you must keep your plot concerted,

as it were. You must constantly surprise her. Won't you come in ? ”

“ I fear that it is too late.”

“ Oh, I didn't think of that. Somehow I can't keep track of time when I am with you.”

Then I caught her hand and told her of my love. At first she attempted to stop me, but I poured out my words in a wild flood, and, yielding, she suffered me to press her to my bosom. I fancied that I walked up among the stars when I went home that night, but after I went to bed, a fear found its way into my bosom and lay cold upon my heart—a fear that I should have to take more morphine. I was wretched the next day, and I yielded. Then I said I would take the drug for one day more and stop, no matter if I should be dull and miserable. I did quit the next day, and found that after all it was not so hard a task. Three days passed, and I was free from the influence of morphia, but my rheumatism returned, and I began taking the drug again. I quit again so soon as I recovered, and I swore that I never would touch it again, and yet I knew that I should not be able to entertain Miss Berry.

One evening when I had an engagement to take her to a theater, I felt that I should lose her if I appeared in my natural state of dullness, and—well, I took morphine. We spent a delightful evening, and when I returned home, I decided to take the drug until we were married, and then throw it away forever. The months passed with elysian dreaminess. I could not believe that any other man had ever been so happy. The wedding day approached. It came, and I saw

my beautiful bride receiving the congratulations of her friends.

I bought a pleasantly situated house and moved into it. During the excitement I had forgotten the promise which I had made to myself, but I thought of it about the time we were well settled. Then it came upon me, and I shuddered, but resolved to keep it.

The resolve went into effect one morning when we had been keeping house two weeks. I well remember the morning. My wife was joyous, and talked at breakfast of the many things she intended to do. She was going that day to buy some very old books that she knew I would like. I did not feel so very bad at first, but I was miserable by the time I reached the store. If ten thousand devils had been urging me to take morphine I could not have been more harassed.

Sometimes I felt as if insects with prickly legs were crawling all over me under the skin, and I could find no rest. I went out for a walk. The sun was shining, and yet to me the day was dark. I was constantly afraid of being run over, and if I saw a team far up the street I would wait until it passed before I dared to cross over. My head ached, and at times ice-water seemed to be surging through my veins. Freezing places shifted about on me—sometimes my feet and then my back. Once I thought that my scalp was frost-bitten, and suddenly it occurred to me that my hair had turned white, and I went into a barber-shop and looked at myself. While standing on a corner, afraid to cross, I felt that I was about to die, and I wondered how long it would be before I should drop

dead. I went home in agony — not sharp pains, but a dead, cold lifelessness, worse than the keenest misery.

"What on earth is the matter, dear?" my wife asked.

"Nothing, only I don't feel well; it will soon pass off."

"Let me send for a doctor."

"No, I'll soon be all right."

I went to bed and tossed all night. The next morning it seemed that my trouble had just begun.

"You are too ill to go down town," my wife declared.

"Oh, no, I must go. I'd die if I didn't—I mean that I have some very urgent business that must be attended to."

"You must not go."

"I must—I will."

That evening when I returned home my wife was delighted. I was bright and cheerful. I had taken morphia, not abandonly, for I was determined to quit; but the weeks, yes, the months passed. Finally I gave up all thought of quitting, and began to increase my allowance. It was a long time before my wife suspected that she had married a morphine-eater, and I thought that her heart would break when she made the discovery. She urged me to make another attempt to quit, and declared that she would help me. How little she knew!

About this time I made a discovery—my strong tendency toward lying—and it was not long after this until it was almost impossible for me to tell the truth. I went home one day and told my wife that I had

bought out my partners, and when she asked me where I got the money, I thus replied :

“ My uncle came to town this morning and gave it to me.”

“ Dear,” she said, “ you must be joking.”

“ No, I’m telling the truth.” The truth was that I had been requested to sell and get out of the store.

By this time the drug had ceased to have a pleasurable effect. All that I could expect was freedom from pain. I became more and more talkative, but what I said amounted to nothing. My wife would often go to bed and leave me sitting up, talking. I would go into the bed-room and talk her to sleep, and then feel disgusted. A hellish idea occurred to me one night. “ If I should get her into the habit of taking the drug, she would then be companionable. I cannot live without companionship. But how can I get her to take it ? ”

For several days I succeeded in putting it into her coffee. I ought to have been shot down like a dog. She was a nervous creature, and the effect of the drug was wonderful. She found no more fault with me, and was anxious to sit up and talk. By this time I was out of the store, and had nothing to do but sleep all day.

One day I did not give her any morphine. It had become too much trouble to slip it into her coffee. I would make her take it of her own accord. By noon-time she was almost raving. Her nerves were unstrung. I told her what I had done, and she cursed me, not with oaths, but with an upbraiding that no one could ever forget.

"Dear," said I, attempting to calm her, "it was love for you and a yearning for your society that caused me to give you the drug. You once said that you would help me to quit. There is one way you can help me. Take morphia for awhile, and then let us quit together. Your nerves are unstrung. Let me quiet them." I measured out a dose. "Come, take this, and in a few moments you can look back upon this distress and laugh at it. You know how I worship you, and if you love me you will yield to my entreaty."

She yielded. My mental and moral sinking had so much affected her that she seemed to have lost all hope.

Sometimes we would sit up all night and sleep all day. I was not happy, but felt a dull sort of contentment. Our friends fell away and we were left alone. I did not attempt to engage in any sort of business, although my deposit at the bank was shrinking. Several years passed, and we were forced to sell our house. We resolved to remove to a less expensive city, and we came to Omaha. We rented a respectable-looking flat and continued to live pretty much in our old way. I knew that I should soon be compelled to do something, but I put off the attempt from day to day. The time soon came when I was compelled to go out and solicit employment. I tried at a number of dry-goods stores, but my appearance was against me, and I failed. It was not long after this until I was reduced to so urgent a necessity that I was willing to do any sort of drudgery. I found miserable employment in a brick-yard. We were unable to pay rent,

and were ejected from the flat. We took a small cottage, a mere shanty. My health failed, and I was compelled to give up my work at the brick-yard. We were not worried over our daily bread, but over our daily morphine. I resolved to steal. One night I broke into a drug-store, and for weeks afterward we lay in besotted contentment. We managed to beg what little food we needed, but the rent fell due. We could not beg that. I went out in the street one night and roamed about, looking for something to steal, but could find nothing. The hour had grown late, and the streets were almost deserted, when I took refuge in an alley and waited for some one to come along. I held a brick in my hand. Echoing footsteps — a man. I sprang out and struck him. He fell, and, bending over him, I recognized a grocer who, the day before, had given me a ham. But what difference did that make? I found a purse in his pocket and ran away with it.

"We are all right now," I said, when I reached home.

"How much have you?" my wife asked.

"Twenty dollars."

"How did you get it?"

"Borrowed it."

A month passed, and our stock of morphine was exhausted. I went out in the street, expecting to rob a drug-store, but every place appeared to be watched. I took my place in an alley, but a policeman drove me away. It was nearly morning when I went home. My wife upbraided me.

"We have just enough to last until to-morrow," she said. "Something must be done."

The next morning I was so ill and weak that I could not go out. We passed an awful day. At night my wife, almost raving, cried: "I would give my soul for morphine."

"Then give it," I answered, pointing to the street. "You are still good-looking."

She went out, and after I had wretchedly waited an hour, she returned with the drug.

The months passed. She went out every night. I had ceased to attempt anything, but spent my time in driveling idiocy. One evening when she lingered at home longer than usual a brute came after her. "Come on here now," he said.

"In a minute," she answered.

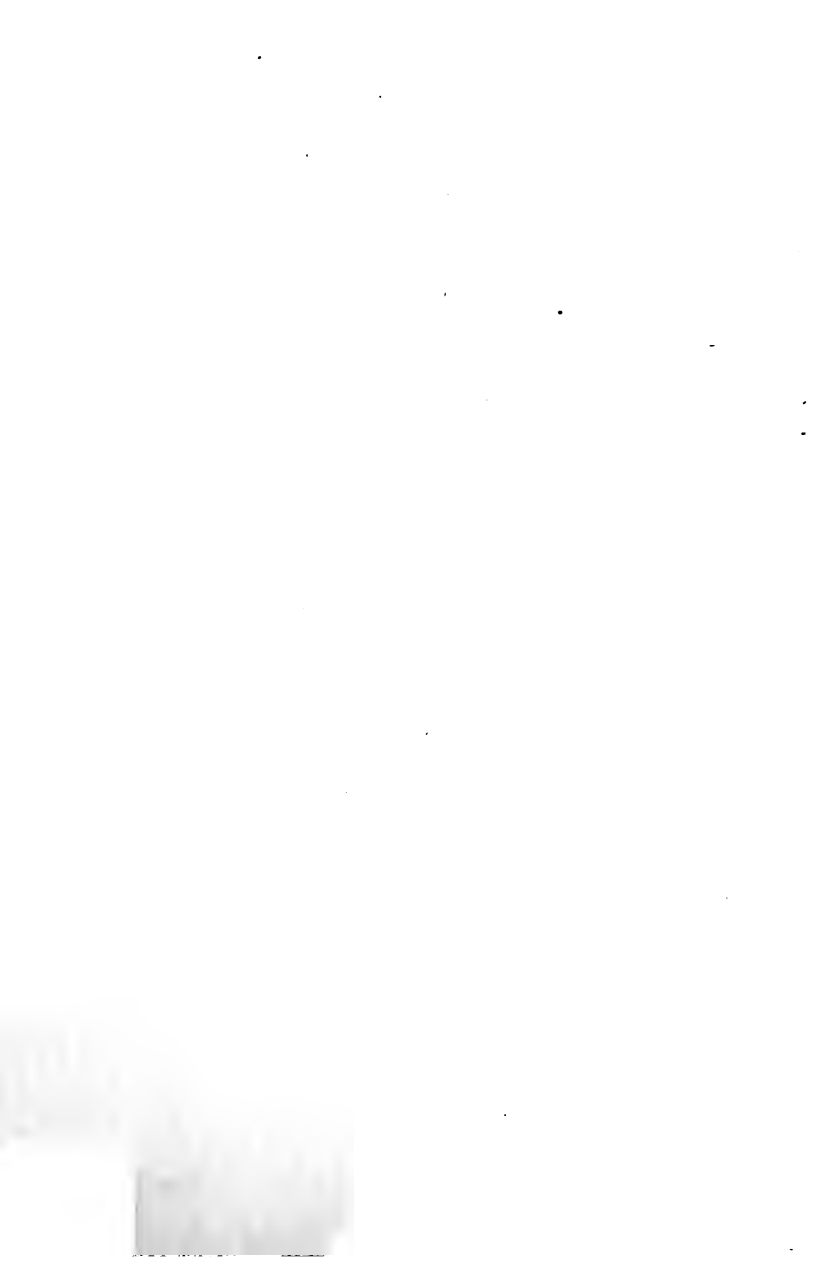
"Come on now, I tell you."

I said something, and he told me to shut up. I saw her go away with him, and I raved like a madman. "This shall be stopped," I swore. I prayed for a return of my faculties—I wanted to write a confession. I had heard that cocaine had a wonderful effect, and that for a short time it would bring back the lost mind of a morphine-eater, and then leave him a wretch, with a dead brain.

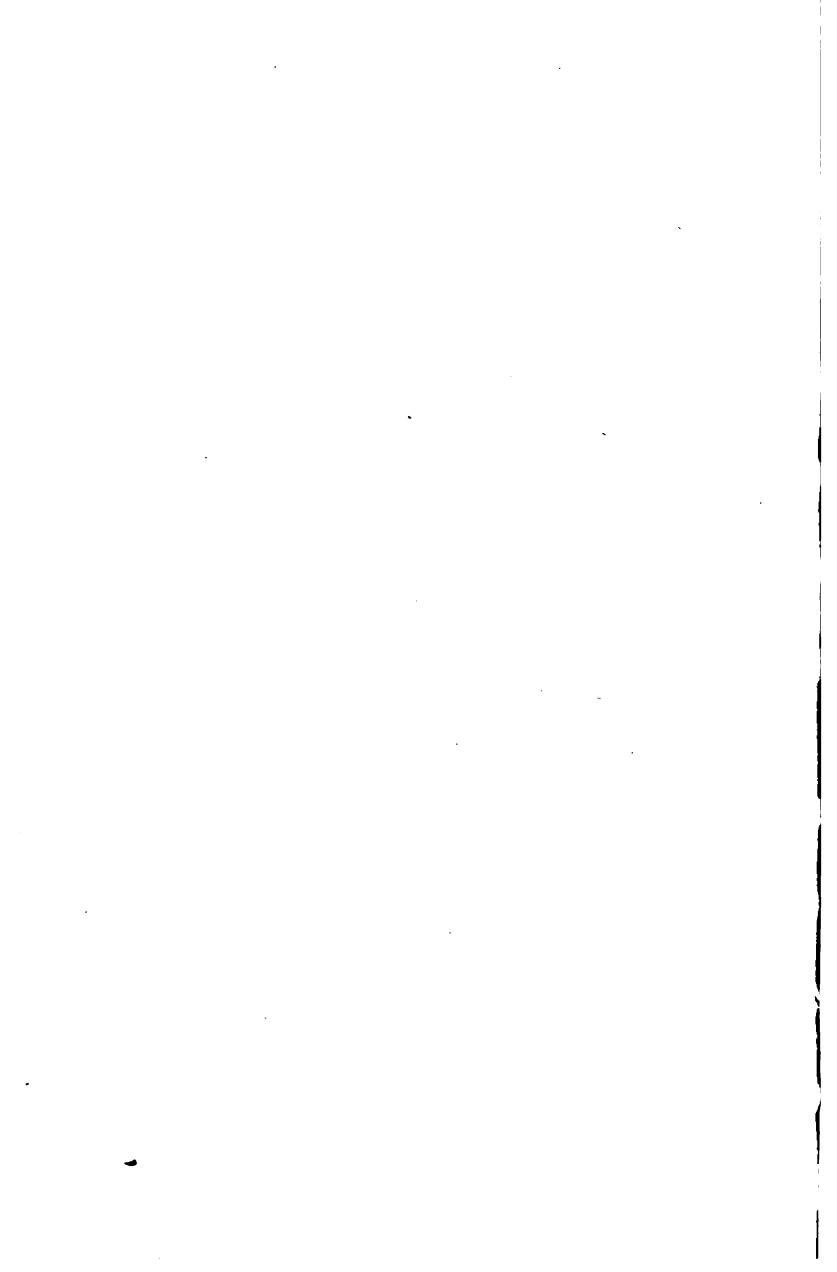
Early this morning I took cocaine, and I have been writing all day. I have full command of my faculties. Amy will not go out to-night. The brute came to the door just now, and I told him that she had gone away. She now lies on a pile of straw near me, breathing heavily. I gave her poison. To-morrow morning all

will be changed. She will soon be dead. I will watch her until her poor, soiled soul passes away, and then my blackened spirit shall follow her. I know not what to expect in the world beyond, and I do not care what may come, for I know that there can be no hell worse than the one I have passed through. Amy is dead. I will now swallow the poison.

R. B. Mayhew, a former coroner of the county, and the man who gave me the manuscript, said: "We found them lying dead upon a pile of straw. The man's face bore evidences of horrible suffering, but the woman must have died peacefully."



Sun Dust.



SUN DUST.

DAVE KENSETT, an industrious old negro who lives down in the bottoms, is greatly annoyed by the members of the church to which his wife belongs, and especially is he annoyed by Strawfoot Alf, the preacher. No one has any confidence in Alf's honesty, and it is only for his ability as an organizer and camp-meeting sensationalist that he is permitted to remain in the church. Old Dave was known as a good liver. Baked shoat, buttermilk and cabbage were nearly always found on his table. No matter how adverse the wind might be, Alf could, from a great distance, sniff the incense of a shoat, and, unless the intervening water-courses were swollen beyond a point of safety, he always managed to be on hand. Naturally enough, Dave became tired. Although not strictly religious, he was willing to do his part toward keeping up the church, but he was not willing to take entire care of the preacher.

"'Liza," old Dave one day remarked to his wife, "I'll bet dat shoat won't be mor'n brown good 'fore Alf will be heah wid his mouf open."

"Oh, doan talk dater way, Dave."

"Wall, he will, no matter whuder I talks dater way ur not. I'll bet he's already gunter fling dat awful nose o' hizen up inter de a'r. 'Liza, I's gittin' mighty tired o' dat gennerman's 'vastations. He's got er ap-

pertite like er suck-hole an' blame 'fi gwineter stan' him no longer."

"Oh, doan speckterate dat way, Dave, fur he's my bruder in de church."

"I doan kere ef he wuz yer bruder in de flesh, I ain't gwine ter stan' him. W'y, he would break up de gubner o' de State. Yander he comes now. Whut did I dun tole yer?"

"Wall, fur heben's sake doan say nuthin'. Treat him wid warm frien'ship. Promise me dat, won't yer?"

"Oh, yas, I'll treat him wid warm frien'ship."

"Mawnin' te yer; mawnin'," said the preacher, as he opened the gate. "How does yer do dis mawnin', Bruder Dave?"

"Fust-rate, I gins yer thanks."

"An' yesse'f, Sister 'Liza?"

"Oh, I's mighty well, I thanks yer, 'siderin' dis awful hot weader. Let me fetch yer a cheer."

"I thanks yer, sister."

The preacher sat down, took off his plug hat and wiped the perspiration from his bald head.

"Lemme take yer hat, Bruder Alf," said Dave.

He took the hat, went into the kitchen, took down a paper of ground red pepper and gave the inside of the "tile" a liberal sprinkling. Then, returning to the sitting-room, he placed the hat on the bed.

"Dis is a mighty long dry spell," said Dave, when he rejoined the preacher, who sat leaning back against the house.

"Yas, it's awful."

" I wuz readin' in a paper dis mawnin', Bruder Alf, dat er monst'ous sight o' people is bein' killed by de sun."

" Dat so ? "

" Yas, an' cu'is ter say, de cullud folks is gettin' de wo'st o' it."

" Am dat er fack ? " asked the preacher.

" Yas, an' da say dat shoat dis sorter weder knocks er man sideways; but I kain' he'p dat, fur dar ain't nothin' dat fits my appetite like er baked shoat. Wife, she's in de kitchen dar now, moppin' one."

" I 'grees wid yer, Bruder Dabe. Shoat fits my appetite, an' I's gwine ter eat it, sun or no sun."

" Yas, I 'speck so. De great doctor whut I wuz readin' erbout in de paper dis mawnin' said dat he neber did see de sun retch ober an' hit down in sich er awful way, an' er strange fack is dis : Er man fust feels it by er burnin' on de top o' de head. De burnin' gets wus, an' ef he's gwine ter die putty soon, he puts his han' on de top o' his head an' fin's some little red stuff. De doctor says dat dis is sun dust."

" Yer doan' tell me so ! " the preacher exclaimed.

" Oh, yas, I does, an' it's awful bad, too. Er pusson doan' know when he gwineter git dat sun dust on his head. Er po' man stopped heah day afore yistidy an' axed fur er drink o' water. I axed him ter come in, an', jes' arter he drunk de water, he put his han' on his head an' 'plained. Puttysoon he raked off suthin' red. I neber did see sich er look ez come outen dat man's eyes. He run outen de house an' toted hisse'f off in er hurry. Sence den I heerd dat de po' man wuz dead an' de red stuff waz sun dust. Say, Bruder Alf, while Lize's er moppin' dat shoat wid er mighty fine gravy,

s'pose we step down ter de lot an' look at de blooded calf." The preacher agreed. "Neber mine yer hat," Dave added. "Yas, yer better get it, fur de sun's awful."

The preacher put on his hat and walked along with old Dave, and had not gone far when he remarked :

"My head ez sorter smartin', Bruder Dave."

"Oh, I reckons not. It mus' be yer 'magination. Da say dat when de sun dust comes de bes' thing is exercise, but I b'lebe dat when it do come er pusson is putty nigh gone."

They had walked a short distance farther, when the preacher stopped and said :

"Look a heah, I b'lebes dar is suthin' de matter wid me, fur my head's er stingin' like flyer."

"I reckons not."

"But I knows it is."

He took off his hat, passed his hand over his head, looked at his hand, and exclaimed :

"Oh, Lawdy!"

"Whut's de matter! Lemme see? Dinged ef it ain't sun dust."

"Oh, Lawdy!" again exclaimed the preacher, and, leaping over the fence, he rushed into the woods. Old Dave shook. He took off his hat, shook his head, and, as he saw the preacher leap over a log and disappear, he said :

"It am er pity dat er good man like dat is so badly 'flicted. Ef dat sun dust keeps on er fallin' roun' heah no nigger ain't gwine ter be safe, er haw, haw! Fust thing I knows I mout be racin' roun' like er deer, er he, he!"

When Dave returned to the house his wife asked :

“ Whar’s Bruder Alf ? ”

“ Oh, he said dat he had some business ter tend ter an’ dat we mus’ ’scuse him terday. I tried ter ’suade him ter come in an’ eat er snack, but he said he wa’n’t hungry.”

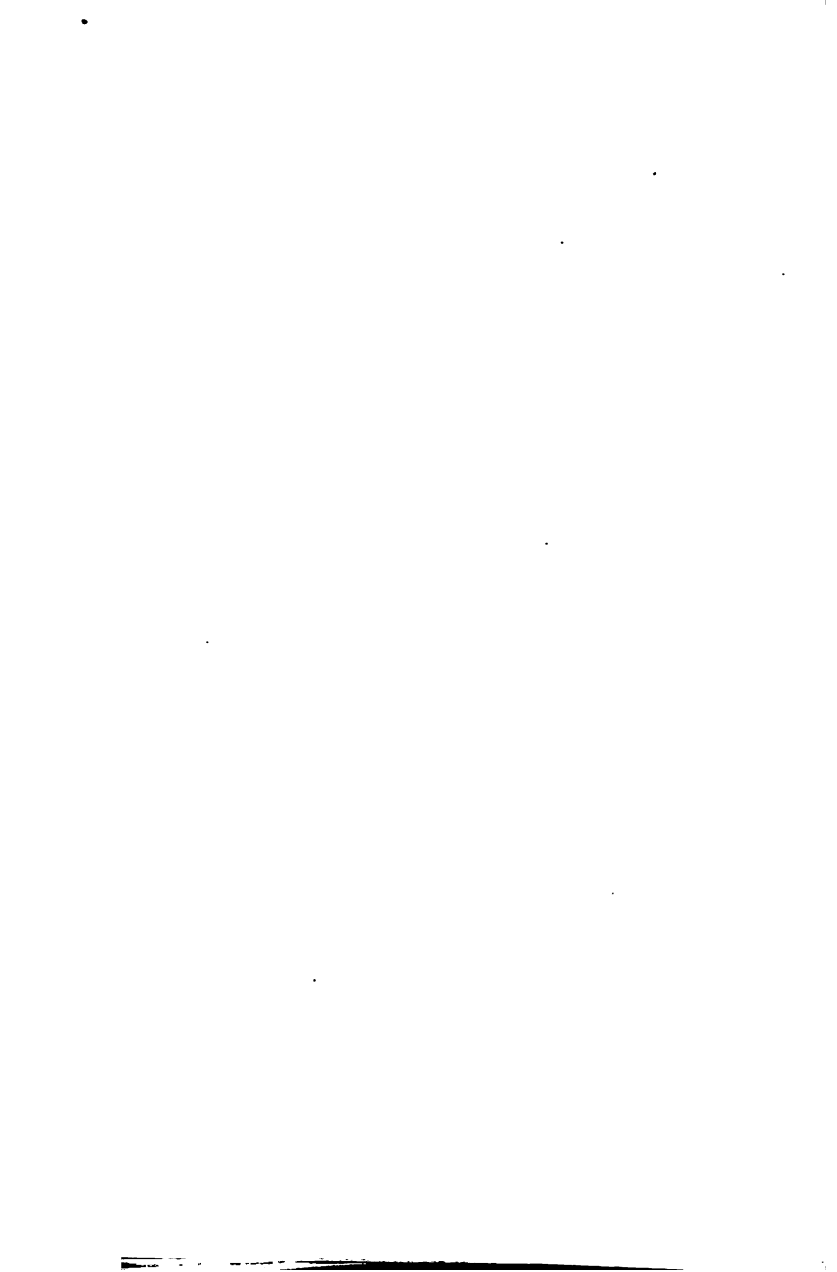
“ Din’ yer say suthin’ to hurt his feelin’s, Dave ? ”

“ No, bless yer.”

“ Wall, you must’ve treated him wrong. I tole yer ter treat him wid warm frien’ship.”

“ Wall, dat’s ’zackly whut I done. I reckons he’s mor’n two miles frum heah by dis time.”

As ’Liza turned to place the shoat on the table, Dave poked his head out of the door and laughed.



No Mo' Widders.

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NO MO' WIDDERS.

I.

"I'M tired. I have worked like a slave without result, and now I'm going to stop. Why should I wear myself out merely to learn how to put my few thoughts on paper? I have read book after book; I have studied style after style, and yet my best efforts are clumsy, without the attraction which we sometimes find in peculiar bluntness. I remind myself of a man who has exhausted his strength in trying to lift a ponderous log; and though my vigor is dead, my yearning is still alive. I have never thought, as so many foolish men and women do, to make a living by my pen. My ambition has had no grander flight than the hope of gracefully and forcibly expressing myself in pure English; but when I have looked at my lines I have found them awkward, and when I have weighed my words I have found them light. Everything I read puts me to shame. Here, in a foolish little story, is a sentence of which I would never have thought—an idea which I could not have conceived. I will worry with my pen to-night, but to-morrow I will throw it away."

"Mr. Balkin," said old man Gatewood, appearing in the door, "I've jes' fetched some fresh water from

the spring. Won't yer try er few lines, ez the feller says ? ”

“ No, thank you. ”

“ Still writin' ? ” the old man asked, stepping into the room.

“ Yes. ”

“ Well, ” said the old fellow, placing the bucket of water on a chair and glancing at a pile of manuscript, “ what makes yer do it ? Yer ain't er county clerk, air yer ? ”

“ Oh, no ; I only write for my own amusement. ”

“ Don't 'pear ter me thar's so powerful much 'musement in a feller humpin' hisse'f thater way. ”

“ To tell you the truth, Mr. Gatewood, there isn't much amusement in it. Wait a minute, ” he added, as the old man took up the bucket. “ Can you give me any kind of work to do ? ”

“ W'y, bless yer life, me an' Jim does all the work, ez the feller says. Thar ain't much ter do on this here po' place. Good night. ”

Mr. Anderson Balkin, a school-teacher in the neighborhood of Blue Fork, Ark., had, when the term of his school expired, engaged board with the family of Andrew Gatewood, an old fellow who knew but little of the world and who cared less ; a man whose idea of happiness was to have his own way, and whose religion was hard work. He was a powerful man physically, slightly stooped as though unable to entirely straighten up from the memory of having set out so many sweet-potato slips. His whiskers were as stiff and as grizzled as the stuffing of a buggy-cushion ; his nose, crooked and sharp, partook of the shape of a scythe,

and his eyes, never wide open, had a peculiar squint, as if dodging the rays of the sun. His wife was pale and thin, a fair type of the Southern backwoodsman's wife—a woman who was the slave of an old-fashioned fire-place; who, at evening, when bull-bats bellowed, sang a melancholy song. She had never known a day of pleasure, had never seen a star of promise. Gatewood had two daughters and a son. One of the daughters was a widow, and the younger one was a handsome, delicate girl. This girl, Emily, had gone to school to Balkin, and it is not idle to conjecture that she was the cause of the teacher's presence in the household.

"Balkin wants ter work fur us," said the old man when he entered the sitting-room.

"Mighty po' work he ken do," replied Jim, a rough, burly fellow, who sat greasing hame-strings. "Reckon he ain't got no money an' sorter wants ter pay his boa'd. Em ken do that, kain't yer, Em?"

"Now, Jim, I want yer ter hush an' let me erlone. All time pickin' at me anyway."

"Hush, Jimmie," said Mrs. Gatewood. "Don't pester the chile. Pap," addressing her husband, "wush yer'd han' me down them socks. Up thar on the mantel, turned inter one 'nuther."

The old man did as requested; then, after sitting down, taking off his shoes and striking them together over the hearth, he said:

"Whut do all this mean 'bout Em payin' boa'd?"

"Ax Em," Jim replied with a snort.

The old man turned to Emily, looked at her steadily and said: "Don't let us have no foolishness."

The timid girl trembled and blushed beneath his gaze. "I said don't let's have no foolishness. Ain't thinkin' 'bout marryin' him, air yer? W'y, he aint no 'count, an' 'sides that he'll be dead with consumption 'fore six months; but that ain't the wust uv it. Sets thar er scratchin' an' er clawin' all day an' ha'f the night like er ole turkey gobbler."

"He ain't like er ole gobbler if he scratches at night, fur er gobbler goes ter roost at night," the girl replied.

"Fur pity sake," said Mrs. Gatewood, "don't talk so loud; he'll hear yer."

"Ain't keerin' much ef he does," the old man replied. "It mout l'arn him some sense. No wonder he's got consumption. Never done ernuff work ter move his blood. Em, I'd ruther see yer dead than ter see yer marry sich er thing ez he is. Always er scratchin' round an' er hackin' an' er coughin'. Had er went ter work like Jim, thar, he wouldn't never coughed none. Em, look at yer sister, thar—er widder in the house. Nothin' would do her but she must marry er fly-up-the-creek. Now look at her—er widder in the house. Thar, now, Sue, don't blubber, fur yer *air* er widder in ther house. Done ez I tole yer in the fust place, yer wouldn't been er widder, but no, yer must have yer own way an' momox the whole business. I'll see Balkin in the mawnin' an' tell him I don't want no foolishness, ez the feller says. Jim, think it'll rain?"

"Feard not; the win's shifted."

"B'lieve I'll step out an' see. Don't have a shower putty soon the turnips never will come up."

Emily arose and noiselessly followed her father. "Pap," she said, when she had closed the door, "I wish yer wouldn't hurt Mr. Balkin's feeln's. Ef yer don't want him ter stay here tell him ter leave, but don't tell him why. Please don't, pap." She placed both her hands on the old man's arm. He moved impatiently, brushed her hands from his arm, and replied:

"I've got mighty nigh ernuff sense ter ten' ter my own business."

"It is my business, too," she said, with a calmness that startled him.

"The hell yer say! Look here, I don't want no foolishness—don't want no mo' widders in the house."

"He's axed me ter marry him, an' I'm goin' ter do it, 'cause I love him so."

"Em, yer've heard that I killed er man, haven't yer?"

"Yas, sir."

"Wall, when yer marry that feller yer'll hear uv me killin' ernuther. I ain't got no puticular 'jeckshuns ter him ez laung ez he don't fool with my erfairs, ez the feller says, but when he do, I settles with him then an' thar."

The girl sank down upon the doorstep. "Git up," he said, touching her with his foot. "No foolishness; no mo' widders in the house."

Early the next morning Gatewood sought Balkin, whom he found in the woods near the house.

"Mr. Balkin," said he, "I want you to un'erstan' that I don't want no foolishness."

"What do you mean?" Balkin asked, in astonishment.

"I jes' mean this, ez the feller says—mean that I don't want no mo' widders in the house—mean that you shain't marry Em."

Balkin placed his hand on a sapling, as if to support himself, lifted his large, sad-looking eyes, in which there burned an unnatural light, gazed fixedly at the old man, and replied:

"I have asked her to be my wife, and she has consented."

"That don't make a blame bit uv difference," Gatewood impetuously broke out. "I say you shain't marry her, an' you shain't. W'y, blast it, you'll be dead with consumption 'fore five months."

"The contempt with which you speak of my unfortunate condition is inhuman, but as you know not the feelings of a refined man, I will not argue with you. Say that I am near my grave, but do not permit that to shut out another truth, that Emily is not long for this world, and that our separation might hasten her death. As you hope for peace in a world to come, do not drive me away. Let me remain here where"—

"I've done said what I had to say; you must git away from here right now."

"May I bid Emily good-by?"

"No. Stay here, an' I'll fetch your duds."

He soon returned, bringing Balkin's scanty wardrobe and papers. "Now, clear out. 'Pears like the devil hisse'f is tryin' ter run my erfairs."

Balkin looked toward the house, hoping to catch sight of Emily, and then, disappointed, he slowly

turned away. He had proceeded but a short distance along the rugged road, winding among the trees, when Emily suddenly appeared before him. Balkin dropped his bag and caught her in his arms.

"Angel," he said, "you must come with me."

"Oh, I kain't," she sobbed. "If I do, pap'll kill you. Don't say nothin' mo'," she begged, convulsively clinging to him. "Don't, don't! Go on away, an' some time you'll come back fer me. I don't know why, but something tells me so. Thar, good-by."

Mrs. Gatewood sat under the morning-glory vines singing a melancholy song. Emily approached and seated herself on a box near her mother.

"Ma," she said, when the song was hushed, "I am gittin' so weak I kain't hardly walk."

"Hush, darlin', an' don't talk thater way, for ef pap hears yer he'll get mad."

"But, ma, don't yer see how I cough?"

"Yes, precious, but don't say nothin'."

At the breakfast table the next morning old Gatewood said: "I hear that Balkin is over at Frazier's flat uv his back. He staid at Dalton's nearly fo' munts. I b'lieve folks bring all that sorter thing on therselves. What air yer hackin' an' coughin' thater way fer, Em? Tryin' ter ack like Balkin?"

"Pap," Mrs. Gatewood timidly replied, "the chile kain't he'p it."

"Wall, now, yer see yer don't know ez much erbout that ez I do. Don't want to hear no mo' uv that barkin', Em. Hear me?"

"Yas, sir."

"Wall, mind whut I tell yer. Sue," turning to the widow, "hain't yer been puttin' her up ter all this?"

"No, pap, I hain't."

"Wall, yer better not."

After breakfast, while Gatewood was scratching among a lot of old chains and scrap-iron in the smoke-house, looking for a jumping-coulter, Jim came in, shut the door, placed his back against it, and said:

"Pap, I wanter say suthin' that might not soun' like er fiddle. I wanter tell yer that ef yer ever say anything else to Em erbout coughin', that we'll mix right then an' thar. Hold on; yer neenter fly off'n the handle, fur dam'f we don't mix, shore's the devil made sin."

"Yer triffin' rascal, I" —

"That's all right, pap. Yer ken say whut yer please ter me, but jis' open yer head ag'in ter that po' little gal erbout coughin', an' by the time I git through with yer then an' thar, yer hide won't be able ter hol' ernuff wheat straw ter tickle er cat with. Jis' mark whut I tell yer."

"Damn yer fool soul, I ken whup yer in ten minits!" the old man hotly exclaimed.

"That's all right, pap. I'm glad ter see that yer've got sich er good erpinion uv yerse'f, but all the same yer know that I ken wallop the daylight's outen yer an' not ha'f try."

"Jim, it ain't right fur er father an' son ter mix."

"I know that, pap, an' that's why I'm givin' yer fa'r warnin'. That's all I've got ter say on the presen' tex'."

Emily grew weaker day by day. One evening while the girl was lying on the bed, Mrs. Gatewood, after

finishing her melancholy song, stealthily came to her.

"Ma, I don't b'lieve I'll ever git up no mo'."

"Please don't talk thater way, precious. Yer'll be well airter while, an' then we'll git on er hoss an' ride way over ter the mill an' eat dinner at Frazier's."

The girl remained silent for a few moments; then she said: "I ain't erfeard, ma. I don't belong to the church, but I don't b'lieve the Lawd would punish sich er po' little thing ez I am. Thar, ma, please don't cry. Here comes pap."

"How do yer feel?" asked the old man, entering the room.

"I'm erfeard that I don't feel ez well ez I oughter, pap."

"Yer oughter shake yerse'f er' little. I'd feel bad, too, ef I didn't stir 'round none."

Emily did not get up the next morning. She had had a very bad night and had, when she thought that her father was asleep, called her mother. Late in the afternoon Mrs. Gatewood hurried out to the field where Jim and her husband were at work.

"Pap," she breathlessly said, "I want yer an' Jim ter come ter the house. Em is a-dyin'."

The old man, without replying, sullenly followed her. Jim, harnessing a horse to an old spring wagon, drove rapidly away.

Gatewood sat down near the bed and gazed on in silence. The heart-broken mother hid her face in an apron which she took down from a nail.

"What 'pears ter be the matter, Em?" the old man at length asked.

"I don't know, sir, but I b'lieve that I'm dyin'. I

kain't help it," fearing that she had offended her father.

"Whar's Sue?" Gatewood asked, turning to his wife.

"She couldn't stan' it no longer, an' has gone upstairs."

"Ma," said the girl, "ain't it turnin' awful cold?"

"No, darlin'."

"Why don't the sun shine?"

"It is. Don't you see it on the bed?"

"Yes, now I do, but it looks cold. Pap, yer ain't mad at me, air yer?"

"No, child," the old man replied, shivering convulsively. "Em," he said, arising and tottering toward her, "I didn't know yer wuz so sick. No, I didn't," taking her hand and dropping it with a shudder. "I wuz thinkin' so much erbout my work that I couldn't think erbout nuthin' else."

The shadows had grown long when a wagon stopped near the door. The next moment Jim appeared with Balkin in his arms. He placed his burden on the floor. The school-master placed his head on the dying girl's pillow. A breeze, coming through the open window, waved her beautiful hair in his face.

"Jim," the girl whispered, "put my hands on his head. There, that will do. I knowed yer would come back ter me," she said. "Ma, kiss me."

A deep silence fell upon the scene. Jim lighted a candle. The girl and the teacher were dead. Sue appeared in the doorway. Her hair hung loose and her eyes were wild in expression. Pointing a long,

bony finger at the old man she said: "Yer won't have no mo' widders in the house."

Several days ago, while passing through the Arkansas insane asylum, an old man with squint eyes and grizzled whiskers attracted my attention. I spoke to him, and, tottering toward me, he caught my hand, dropped it with a shudder, turned away and muttered: "No mo' widders in the house."

A "Scab!"

A "SCAB."

SEVERAL men were sitting in a Chicago hotel, discussing the result of the street-car strike on the North Side.

"I am in favor," said one man, "of ordering these 'scabs' to leave the city. They are utterly without principle; care nothing for the grievances of their fellow-man; care nothing for hungry women and children."

"I think that your assertion is rather broad," replied an unassuming man. "Let me tell you a short story. Last winter I was a conductor on a North Side limits car. I was a member, in good standing, of the union. In fact, it was said that I held much influence over the men. One night, at a sort of informal meeting held at the barns, I criticised the management of the company. The next day I received notice that my services were no longer needed. I was never more surprised in my life. I requested an explanation, but was told that I was simply no longer needed. The blow fell heavily upon me, for I had got a fair start in paying for a house. I consulted my companions. They professed great sympathy. Every day I would talk to them of my grievance, and after a while I saw that they were tired of listening to me. Of course, I could not expect them to give me money. I decided

to borrow until I could get something to do, but when I asked a man for a small loan—a man, too, whom I had befriended—he muttered complainingly and said that I had no one to blame but myself. I went about town, but could get nothing to do. My children were taken out of school because they were ill-shod. My daughter—a little girl whom I worshiped—was taken down with pneumonia. We had no fire; our room was bitterly cold. I appealed to several of the neighbors.

"They said that if I would go to work and stop loafing about, I might be able to buy all the coal I needed.

"One night, after a day of weary search, I went to my desolate home. My wife met me at the door and threw her cold arms about my neck. 'The doctor has given her up,' she said. There was frost on the little girl's pillow. Her dying breath was freezing.

" 'I am not so cold now,' she said. Her wistful gaze was fixed upon the blaze of a lamp. I bent over her. 'Not so cold now,' she repeated. I took her icy hands. 'Not so cold'—She was gone. The neighbors came in the next day. They built a fire in my stove. Its roar seemed to say, 'Not so cold now.' I despised the heat and moved away from the stove. We buried the little girl while the snow was falling. Just as we were turning away there was a momentary rent in the snow-cloud. A sunbeam fell upon the grave, and I seemed to hear the words, 'Not so cold now.'

"Then followed the weary winter months. I succeeded now and then in getting a day's work, but we often went without fire, and sometimes without food. The summer came with its glorious warmth, but food

was just as scarce, and some days, when I failed to find work, I seemed to see, way over the lake, the coming of another ghastly winter.

"The North Side street-car men struck. The superintendent who had discharged me asked me if I wanted work. Did I? What a question! Had I any patriotism? I had a hungry family. Did I wish to uphold the dignity of labor? My children were without clothes. I took my place on a car. A yelling mob surrounded me. One man — a man who without feeling had seen my starving condition — got on the platform, and, placing one hand on my arm, said:

" 'Come, old fellow, I know you ain't going to root us out of a job? Git off and come along with the boys.'

" 'No.'

" 'We'll give you fifty dollars.'

" 'No.'

" 'We'll see that you do not want for anything. Think of our children who are likely to starve.'

" 'Who thought of mine?'

" 'You are taking the bread out of my wife's mouth.'

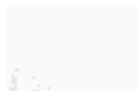
" 'Who took the bread out of my wife's mouth?'

" 'Come, that's no way to talk. Be a man.'

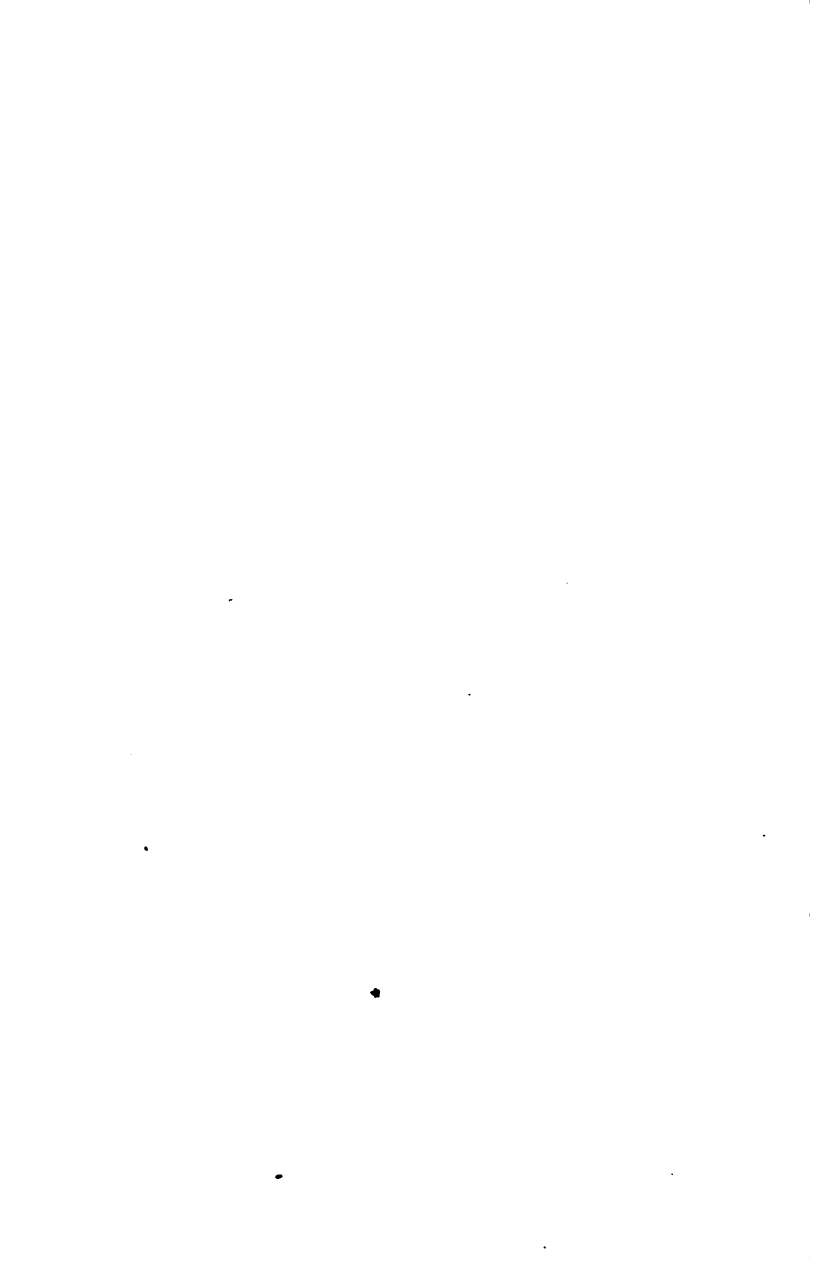
" 'And suffer as I have done — like a stray dog?'

" 'You are a scab. Boys, he won't get off. He's a scab!'

"They tried to pull me off. Some one struck me with a stone, but three days later, when I went home, I met a little boy with a new pair of shoes, and a girl that wore a pink dress."



Little Diser.



LITTLE DISER.

I.

ANY one at all acquainted with Mose Spencer would have known, by merely glancing at him, as he walked along the road one morning, that he was exceedingly angry; and one who prides himself upon being a shrewd pryer into an individual's mind, taking up each thread of motive and tracing it to the end, would have declared that Mose was beset by that consuming and hopeless anger which finds no relief in prospective revenge. I am not inclined to think that Mose was directly descended from the poet whose "*Faerie Queene*" Hume declares is never read except by people who look upon such a performance as a duty, for there was not about Mose even the most remote suggestion of that refinement which contemplates poetry. In appearance he was a typical backwoodsman, but his extreme harshness of face could not rest upon this fact for its origin, for many of the mildest countenances and faces of gentlest expression are found in places where the pedagogue has made but few tracks. Nobody liked Mose. He took such delight in cruelty that he would climb a fence and go through a patch of briars to throw a stone at a harmless dog.

As Mose neared a blacksmith's shop, where several men were lounging, he hesitated upon beholding cer-

tain "devilish fellows" as if he dreaded something, but when one of them yelled at him, he shrugged his shoulders and approached them.

"We've hearn all about it," said Sam Stoveall. "Hearn it this mornin'."

"Yes," Andrew Horn joined in, "an' we're all mighty sorry fur you."

"I want you fellers to shet up," Mose replied, lifting up the tail of his long jeans coat and seating himself on a stump. "The infernal luck is enough without sich talk."

"W'y, what's the matter, Mose?" the blacksmith asked. "I ain't heard nothin'?"

"Gal borned at my house last night," Mose answered.

"Wall, now, that ain't nothin' to cripple a man, is it? Thar's been a gal borned at my house ever' year from about as fur back as I ken recollect, it 'pears to me, an' I ain't seed nobody limpin' round on that account. W'y, confound yore onery pictur', man, you oughter be glad that it is a gal. Boys don't do nothin' but cause trouble, nohow."

"That's all right," Mose rejoined, "but I wanted a boy, an' this gal business makes me as mad as a hornet. I had jest sot my heart on a boy—had prayed for one, an' dreamed that it would be a boy, an' now, confound it, a miserable little ole gal—a common ever'day gal comes to take his place. Fellers, it makes me mad, thar ain't no gettin' round that fack. It makes me so mad that I have dun tuck a oath that I'll never have nothin' to do with the young one. I wouldn't kere ef she'd die befo' I git home."

"Mose, fur the Lawd's sake, don't talk thater way," said the blacksmith. "It's a sin an' a shame fur a man to 'spress hissef thater way agin his own flesh an' blood."

"I've dun said it an' I'll stick to it," Mose replied. "I b'lieve that the Lawd sent that gal jest because He's got a spite agin me."

"I've got a little gal at my house, an' I wouldn't take a heap o' no man's money fur her," Sam Stoveall remarked. "She's jest nachully the puttiest thing I ever seed, an' I'll be dinged if I'd give her for ever' boy on the place."

"You fellers might talk thiser way till — till whut's his name blows his trumpet, an' it wouldn't change my mind none," Mose replied. "An' ef she lives I'm goin' to show her that she found her way inter the wrong house."

"A man that'll talk thater way is a blamed fool!" exclaimed Andrew Horn.

"Be kinder keerful, Andy," Mose replied. "Ricolleck that I ain't took no oath to put up with ever'-thing that a feller is a mind to say to me."

"I don't kere whut you've done nor whut you hain't done, Mose Spencer, but I'll jest l'arn you you kain't talk thater way whar I am without findin' out whut I think of you."

"It ain't none o' yore bus'ness whut I say about my own affairs."

"It mout not be in the sight o' the law," Horn rejoined, "but it is in the sight o' the Lawd, an' as I rid a circuit two seasons, you must know that I've got

more respeck fur the Lawd than I have fur any law our legislature ken make."

"It don't make no difference if you have rid a dozen circuits, you ain't got no right to meddle with me."

"Don't git ashy, boys; don't git ashy," said the blacksmith.

"Wall, let him tend to his own business," rejoined Mose. "He's got no right to come around givin' me p'inters, even if he did ride a circuit. I could a rid a circuit, too, ef I'd a wanted to."

"It's a mighty fine circuit you could ride," rejoined Horn. "W'y, you mout try for ten years to get religion, an' even then the fust thing you'd know old Satan would nab you jest the same as if you hadn't prayed a pra'r."

"I don't 'low no man to talk to me that way," exclaimed Mose, springing to his feet. "I've got enough trouble an' disapp'intment on my mind without being insulted."

"Ketch you jest the same as if you hadn't prayed a single pra'r," Horn repeated.

Mose sprang forward, but the powerful blacksmith seized him and shoved him back. "Don't let us have no skylarkin', Mose," said he. "Some fellers got to skylarkin' in this neighborhood onct, an' one o' 'em trod on a cob, fell an' hurt hisse'f, an' ever sence then I have thought it was danger's fur fellers to skylark. Andy," addressing Horn, "yore horse is dun shod, an' I reckon you mout as well go on home."

Andy grinned, and, whistling a camp-meeting tune, mounted his horse and rode away; and Mose, remaining but a few minutes longer, sullenly strode toward

home. When he reached that place — a desolate log cabin with two tumble-down rooms — he opened the door with a violent shove, and passed into the room which he used as a sort of cobbler-shop. He sat down on a bench, took up an old boot, and had begun to examine it, when an old woman entered.

“Mr. Spencer, don’t you want to see the baby?” she asked.

“Get outen here.”

“Miz Spencer ’lowed that you ” —

“Get outen here, I tell you.”

“My conscience alive, man, won’t you let a person talk? I want you to understand that you air orderin’ yore betters around when you order me. Ef you wuz a little blacker than you air, w’y, I’ve seed the time I could buy an’ sell you three times in a day. You ought to be ashamed o’ yourse’f, you great big, lubberly, good-fur-nuthin’ thing, to get mad at that po’ little baby, jest like she could he’p bein’ a girl; an’ ef I wuz in yore place I’d be afeard the Lord would strike me down, an’ it wouldn’t be no mo’ than right, nuther. Yore wife wants to see you a minit.”

“I don’t want to see her, nur you nuther. Git out.”

“Now, Mr. Spencer, if you will be a fool, let me advise you not to be sich a hard-headed one. Go on in thar a minnit, please. Ef you don’t, I’ll vow an’ declar’ that I’ll trudge right off home an’ let you get somebody else to stay here.”

“Wall, then,” exclaimed Spencer, throwing the boot aside and getting up, “ef nothin’ else will do I will go in, but I want it understood right now that I

won't have nothin' to do with that diserp'intin' critter."

When he entered the room he found his wife weeping bitterly.

"Mose," she said, "fur the Lawd's sake don't stay mad this 'ere way. I know you wanted a boy, but it couldn't be he'ped. Look at the po' little"——

He turned away, and slammed the door as he went out.

II.

With stubborn cruelty Mose had insisted upon naming the child "Diserp'intment," which was in time shortened to Diser. She was a remarkably beautiful child, with long yellow hair and with eyes which looked up with charming inquisitiveness. Until she was two years of age her father took not the slightest notice of her; and once, when he had frowningly turned away from her outstretched arms, Mrs. Spencer said:

"Mose, how ken you do that?"

"Don't talk to me thater way, Sue. You know well enough that I don't want nothin' to do with her."

Diser grew more beautiful as the years came. One day, when the child was about four years old, Mrs. Spencer, upon returning home from a visit to a neighbor, saw her husband, with Diser on his back, trotting around the house.

"What on earth has happened?" the delighted woman exclaimed.

Mose, easing the child to the ground, and then taking her into his arms, replied;

"I hil out like a fool, Sue, but I jest nachully had to come to taw. She's the sweetest human I ever seed."

An' I ain't afeard o' him, mamma," the little girl cried. "See," putting her arms around his neck. "He ain't mad at me any more, air you, papa?"

"Mad at you! W'y, ef a man wuz to say I wuz mad at you, I'd hit him then an' thar."

"'Cause I couldn't he'p bein' a gal, could I?"

"No, honey, an' I am glad you air a gal. I didn't think it wuz possible fur me to love anybody as much as I do you."

"An' mamma too?"

"Yes, an' her too."

The poor, overworked woman seemed younger after this, and the songs which she sang at evening were of more cheerful tune. Every one noticed the change in Mose's character, and neighbors who had, during many years, avoided his society, now often called upon him at evening and discussed the Scripture while the whip-poorwills, among the branches of the hickory trees, tuned their weird pipes.

The river being so low that the boats could not run, Mose was commissioned to haul a wagon-load of flour from a small town in an adjoining State to the neighborhood in which he lived. It would require several days to make the trip, and the idea of such a journey gave great anxiety to little Diser.

"I will bring you a great big doll," said Mose.

"Will you?" clapping her hands.

"Yes, a great big one."

"An' not made outen rags, either."

"No; made outen — outen — blast me if I know what

they air made outen, honey, but I know they ain't made outen rags. I won't be gone but fo' days, an' then, my gracious, what a doll — whoopee — what a doll !”

The buying of a whole wagon-load of flour was a mammoth transaction in which Mose felt a keen pride, and he stood about the door of the warehouse giving himself the airs of a great speculator; but his greatest pleasure was experienced when he purchased Diser's doll.

“Jest wrap that up keerful as you ken an' put it in some sort o' box,” he said to the storekeeper.

“For your little girl, I reckon,” the tradesman remarked.

“You hit it squar, sir; you hit it perfectly squar. You've hearn o' angels, I reckon.”

“Oh, yes.”

“Wall, she's one, whether thar ever wuz any other ur not. She found me one o' the meanest an' sinnin'est men in the world, but ef she hain't come mighty nigh makin' a sort o' saint outen me I'll be slathered and slammed.”

“You love her a good deal, no doubt,” said the tradesman, putting the doll into a box.

“Look here,” said Mose, “ef you didn't 'pear to be a putty good sort o' feller I'd pull out your nose long enough to tie in a knot for sayin' that I love her a good deal. W'y, sir, it's all I can do to keep from drappin' down on my knees an' worshipin' her.”

“Got any boys ?”

“No, an' don't want none. All I want is little Diser.”

“That her name ?”

“Yes.”

"Sort of a curious name, ain't it?"

"Wall, yes, I reckon it is to anybody that ain't used to it. To tell you the truth, I wanted a boy so bad that when she wuz born I named her Diserp'intment. Arter I fell in love with her—an' that wa'n't until she was a good big gal—I wanted to change it, but she tuck on so that I 'lowed that I'd better let it stay jest as it wuz. Wall, it's about time I was startin' out, fur unless theriver has riz sence I left, some folks is hankerin' powerful fur flour by this time."

When within about ten miles of home, Mose stopped at a cross-roads store to get a drink of water. The sun had just gone down behind the distant bluffs on the river. When he stepped into the store a loud shout greeted him, and Andy Horn, Sam Stoveall and the blacksmith pressed forward and congratulated him upon the success of his great journey.

"Tell us all about it, Mose," said the blacksmith.

"I would, boys; I'd tell you ever'thing, but the fack is I'm putty nigh dead to git home. W'y, it 'pears like I ain't seed Diser an' my wife sence the drouth. You jest oughter see a doll that I've fotched that chile."

"Wall, fetch it in an' let us see it," said Andy Horn.

"No, not now. I wouldn't unwrap it fur pay. I want Diser to see whut good keer I've tuck o' it. Any o' you been out my way lately?"

"No, I b'lieve not," Sam Stoveall replied. "Everybody is been busy makin' cross-ties fur the railroad that they say is comin' through here summers."

"Wall, then, fellers, I must shove on. Good evenin'."

•

He did not deliver the flour, but hurried home, musing that he would go over to the store after he had witnessed Diser's joy upon beholding the doll.

"Helloa, what's this hoss doin' tied here?" he said when he drove up to the gate. Without waiting to unhitch his horses he seized the box containing the doll and hurried to the house. His wife met him with a sob, and, before he could recover from his astonishment, the neighborhood physician stepped forward and said :

"Mr. Spencer, there is no hope for your beautiful little girl. She is dying."

"My God! Dock, you don't mean"—He caught sight of the child lying on a bed in a corner of the room, and, rushing forward, he dropped on his knees at her bedside.

"Little angel! little angel! papa has brought your doll. Little angel—my God, she don't know me! Diser—little angel—speak to me, won't you? You mustn't leave papa, little precious. He can't live without you. Get away, all of you! Let me take her."

He took her in his arms. She looked up and said :
"You ain't mad at me, air you?"

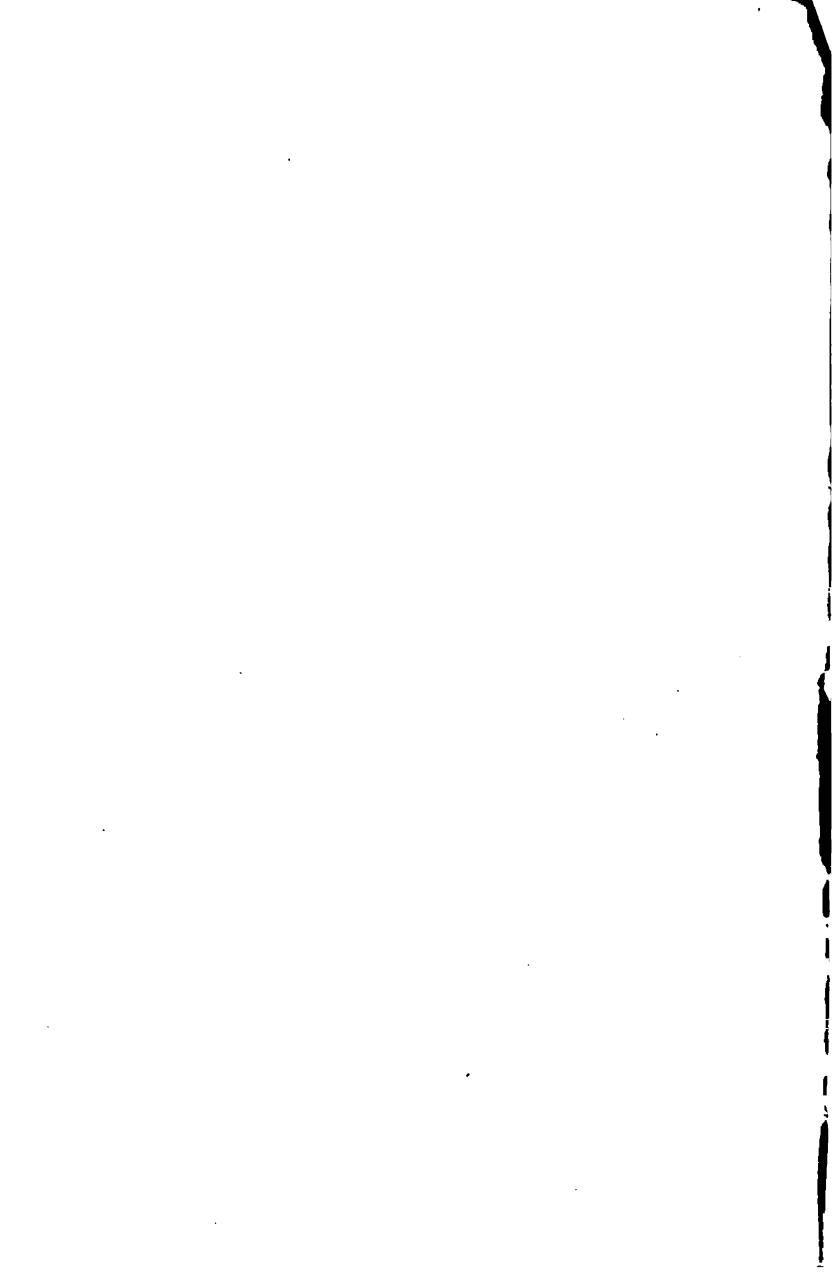
"Oh, my God, sweet angel, don't say that! Diser, Diser—merciful Lawd, doctor, she is chokin'!"

He put her upon the bed, and in frenzy fell upon the floor and tore his hair.

"It is all over," said the doctor.

The whippoorwills among the branches of the hickory trees tuned their weird pipes.

Big Lige.



BIG LIGE.

I.

NO ONE in the least acquainted with a certain district of Arkansas will ever go to "Nubbin Ridge" expecting to find rich meadows, fine cattle, educated people or attractive farm-houses. "Nubbin Ridge" is a broad and rugged backbone, humped up, it seems, in an eternal attitude of contemplated violence, not to be wholly dissociated from a mule in the act of throwing its rider. The people, like the soil, are poor; and again, like the soil, they utter no complaint against a condition which they fancy nature intentionally enjoined upon them. They argue, with a philosophy which wiser men might admire, that so long as there is plenty "uv haug an' hom'ny" in the house discontent should not be permitted to cross the threshold.

Anderson Petticord was, doubtless, the most prosperous farmer on "Nubbin Ridge." He was a small, "dried up" old man, with a wheeze that had gained for him the nickname of "Old Quinzy." His wife was a fleshy, round-faced, talkative woman, but she was known to be one of the "stirrin'est critters" on the Ridge. Millie Petticord, the only offspring of a long union, was called the "puttiest" girl in the neighborhood. Her rich plenitude of hazelnut-colored hair, her brown eyes, clear complexion and graceful form

made her an object of such general admiration that Sim Bumpus, the acknowledged wit of the Ridge, often declared that she was the "puttiest thing he ever seed 'cept a colt."

A conspicuous member of the Petticord family was Big Lige Bradshaw. Six feet four inches would scarcely give a correct idea of the height of Big Lige. His movements reminded one of the gentle running of a powerful piece of machinery. His hair was coarse and dark, but his chin and cheeks were covered with a short growth of reddish beard. During many years he had worked for Petticord, and he seemed to have no ambition except to perform the work of two ordinary men. He had but little to say. Sometimes, in the winter, when he had brought in the wood for the night and had built a great log fire, he would sit during the entire evening, shelling corn or making shuck collars for the work-horses. When he laughed, which was rare, he laughed with a hearty roar, and when he did have anything to say he said it with a directness of expression which many educated men have failed to command.

"Big Lige, is thar much uv a frost this mawnin'?" old man Petticord asked one morning when the giant came in from the stable. The day for hog-killing had arrived, and the family, having arisen before daylight, sat by the fire in the sitting-room, waiting for the arrival of the neighbors who were to assist in the slaughter.

"Yes," Lige replied.

"A reg'lar killin' frost?"

"A reg'lar dead'ner."

"That's good, fur 'long towards midnight I wuz

afear'd the weather wuz goin' to turn warm. It would be a powerful slam on us ef the meat wuz ter spile. Whut air yer funtering airtter?" the old man added, turning to his wife, who, in attempting to reach up after something, had fallen against his chair.

"I want'er git that old bonnet. Don't yer see whut I am airtter?"

"Wall, whut made yer hang it so high?" he replied with a wheeze. "Tromp er body to death er retchin' roun' airtter yer duds. Fur the Lord's sake set down an' rest yerself. Yer commence ter stir, stir, stir as soon as yer git up uv er mornin', an' it's stir, stir, stir tell yer lay down at night."

"Fur goodness' sake, pap, don't fuss. A body has ter stir roun' some little, I reckon."

"Wall, wall, don't let us argy. Millie!"

"Yas, sur."

"Ain't yer er noddin' thar?"

"I reckon I wuz," the girl acknowledged.

"Wall, don't nod."

"I kain't he'p it, pap, fur I'm a-sleepy. I hadn't mor'n got in bed, it 'peared like, 'fore you called me ter git up."

"Wall, wall, that'll do, but don't let us have no noddin'. Big Lige, whut'll the white sow weigh?"

"Four fifty."

"Yas, every ounce uv it." The old man got up, went to the door, looked out, and said:

"No daylight nowhar yit. Did the Dye boys say they wuz a-comin', Big Lige?"

"Yas, and Jim Polk Brezentine said he wuz a-comin'."

Millie looked up. The old man turned from the door, resumed his seat, and said:

"I don't know whut good Jim Polk Brezentine ken do at a haug-killin'. A man that's been a school-teacher an' a member uv the legislature ain't much force at a haug-killin', I'm a-thinkin'."

"He can tote water, I reckon," Lige replied.

"Don't you pester yerself about Jim Polk Brezentine, Big Lige," Mrs. Petticord said in a voice of sharp reproof. "Tote water, indeed! I don't reckon that he has ter tote water. Do you hear that, Big Lige?"

"Yessum."

"Wall, wall," interposed the old man, "don't let us jower this mawnin'. 'Pears like the whole kit an' bilin' uv yer air gone wrong. Millie!"

"Yas, pap."

"Ain't yer er noddin' agin?"

"No, pap."

"Wall, put the breakfus' on the table an' let us have er bite ter eat agin the folks comes, ef they air comin'."

Millie promptly obeyed, and a few moments later, by the light of the stone lamp, the breakfast was served.

"Git out, will yer?" exclaimed the old man as he violently thrust one foot under the table. "It does seem that the dogs will take the place. W'y, maw," addressing his wife, "this ain't our dog! Wall, I wish I may die ef yander ain't Scott Patterson, an' Sallie, too. Draw up, fur we air waitin' fur yer."

"No," said Patterson, as he entered and leaned a long rifle against the wall. "We've done eat."

Millie jumped up and brought a chair for Sallie, Scott Patterson's sister. Scott was almost as slim as his rifle, and Sallie—well, Sallie was not handsome. Her face was pale, her features were pinched, and her eyes were small. She, in observance of "Nubbin Ridge" custom, wore a homespun dress and a gingham sun-bonnet. She never lost an opportunity of visiting the Petticords, for she had, long ago, cast an eye of matrimonial longing upon Big Lige.

"Scott," said Petticord, "I see you've come prepar'd to do the shootin'."

"Yas, I allus do that."

"Wall, rickerleck that it puts the whisky on yer every time yer make a haug squeal."

"Lemme tell yer, ole Quinzy: Ef you don't get a drink tell Scott Patterson shoots a haug an' don't drap him in his tracks, yer'll be goin' roun' powerful dry."

"That's what I know, Scott. Who's that a singin'? It's the Dye boys. Big Lige, go down an' see ef the fire's all right. Hurry up; they've all come."

"I'll go with yer, Big Lige," said Sallie Patterson.

"Come on, then," Lige replied.

The growling and snapping of dogs in the yard, the tramping of horses at the gate—shouting, laughter and good-humored bantering heralded the arrival of the neighbors. There was 'Squire Boyle, justice of the peace; the Dye boys, and especially there was Jim Polk Brezentine; but above all, perhaps, there was Sim Bumpus, the wit. Brezentine, who, as Big Lige

once remarked, "had got jest ernuff edycation ter make him triffin'," was a sort of dandy. He wore his hat on one side of his head, and he took particular care that the legs of his brown jeans trousers should not hide the red shoe-strings in the yellow tops of his boots. He was a favorite among the young women, for he could take up a book "an' read it off jes' like talkin'." The wit was of that peculiar type never seen in any part of the country where the railway engine rushes like a storm of civilization. Yellow hair, a head like a pineapple cheese, eyes of butter-milk hue, a grin that sought not much-needed rest—all together describe, as nearly as possible, the type of manhood represented by Mr. Sim Bumpus.

Sallie accompanied Lige to a small pond near which a large log fire had been made.

"The fire's all right, Big Lige."

"Yas, an' the rocks'll soon be hot ernuff to put in the water an' heat it."

"Why wouldn't it be jest as good ter bile the water 'stead o' heatin' it with hot rocks, Big Lige?"

"'Cause the seedyment from the rocks makes the haug's ha'r come off easier."

"I didn't think uv that. Yer know everything, it 'pears ter me."

Lige threw back his enormous head and laughed. "Know ever'thing!" he said. "W'y, Sallie, I don't know nothin'. I know jest about ernuff to keep outen hot water, an' that's all."

"Wall, that's a good 'eal, fur I know uv folks that's in hot water nearly all the time. Do yer know what's a fack? Millie's in love with Jim Polk Brezentine."

Big Lige had taken up a handspike and was endeavoring to turn over a burning log. He dropped the handspike when Sallie made the remark, and, with a pretense of shielding his face from the heat, raised one arm and hid his eyes.

"You may not believe it, but it's so," the girl continued. "It's awful nice ter love somebody. I ought to know. Why don't you ask me how I know, Big Lige?"

"How do you know?" he asked, as he picked up the handspike and leaned upon it.

"'Cause I love somebody. Folks says he's big an' ugly, but I don't think so."

Lige threw down the handspike, turned to Sallie, and said:

"I've got ter go ter the house now an' fetch down the tubs."

"No; let's wait here tell the folks come. Thar's ernuff uv them ter fetch the tubs. Yer air allus a pesterin' y'urself thinkin' that somebody else'll have somethin' to do. This is all mighty well when thar ain't nobody roun' but wimin folks, but it's all foolishness when the woods is full o' men."

"Whut you say, Sallie, may be true, but I've got ter go an' fetch the tubs."

"Well, go on, then, Mr. Smarty."

A beautiful day had dawned, but to Big Lige it was a day of sadness. He had long suspected that Millie loved Brezentine, but now he knew it, not particularly because Sallie had said so, but because he had seen on Millie's face an expression of pleasure when Mrs. Petticord defended Brezentine against the insinuation that

he could at least be utilized as a water-carrier ; but at no time during the day did Lige permit any one to look into his heart and see a shrouded hope lying there. Once, and only once, did he say anything that might have been construed to hold a meaning deeper than that of a passing remark. He had just thrown down a heavy hog when Sim Bumpus said :

" I tell you whut ; some men can tote heavy loads on the'r shoulders."

" Yas," Lige replied, " an' some men can tote heavier loads on the'r hearts."

" Yer never toted a heavy load on yer heart, did yer, Big Lige ? " 'Squire Boyle asked, as he took up a hoe and began to stir up the steaming fragments of rock in the scalding-box.

" Oh, no, 'squire. It ain't calc'lated that some folks has got hearts."

" Hearts don't ermount ter much lessen they're trumps," Mr. Bumpus suggested. The men — all but Big Lige — laughed, and Sim was so well pleased that he sought an early opportunity of telling an old joke.

" Sim's a poet as well's a humorist," Jim Polk Brezentine remarked.

" No, I ain't a poet. I don't know but one r'al good piece uv po'try, an' that's one that my gran'daddy told my pap. Gran'daddy said that in the old war, whar he fit the Bridish, they onct got a bar'l uv meat with this here po'try wrote on the head uv the bar'l :

' Wash him clean,
An' bile him clear ;
Been er good ole wuck-hoss
Twenty-five year.'

"Thar's the dinner ho'n!" exclaimed one of the Dye boys. "That's po'try fur me."

"Yas, an' let me tell yer," Sim rejoined, "it's the sort uv rhyme that hits me where I live."

A gay company sat down to dinner, but Big Lige did not speak during the meal. In the evening, when all the neighbors had gone home, the giant went into the woods and remained there until a late hour. When he returned to the house, his quick step showed that he had reached some sort of decision. He opened the door, saw Millie sitting by the fire and said:

"Millie, come out here a minit; I want to speak to you."

"Come in here, Big Lige; there's nobody in here but me."

"Whar's the old folks?" Lige asked as he entered the room.

"In the kitchin. Set down."

"No. What I've got ter say, I ken say it standin' up. Millie, ever sence yer wuz a little thing I've loved yer. I would ruther be er nigger fur yer than ter be the riches' man in the world. I ain't got nuthin' but love an' strength ter offer yer, but I want yer ter be my wife."

The girl, deeply blushing, arose and said:

"No, I thanks yer, Big Lige. I know that yer air a good man, an' that ther's other men that ain't fitten fer nothin' but ter tote water; but I thanks yer, sir; I don't want yer."

He turned away, without replying, and climbed the ladder which led to his room.

II.

In Big Lige's manner toward Millie no change was noticeable. He sat by the fire at night, shelling corn or making shuck collars, but he cast no look of reproach upon the girl. Brezentine's visits became frequent, but Big Lige treated his rival with as much politeness as he had ever shown any one. His roaring laugh, though, which had ever been rare, was now no longer heard. One day, while Petticord and Lige were chopping wood, the old man said:

"Big Lige, Millie is goin' ter git married."

Lige, who was raking the chips away from a log so that his axe might have easier play, did not look up from his work. He merely asked:

"That so?"

"Yas, an' guess who's the man."

"Jim Polk Brezentine."

"Yer hit it, dinged ef yer didn't. Why, Big Lige, you're a guesser. Yer guessed how much the white sow would weigh, an' now yer've guessed whut man Millie is goin' ter marry. Whut do yer think uv the match?"

"Dam pore."

"Whut?"

"I said dam pore."

"Wy, man, Jim Polk is a schollard an' a gentleman, an' wuz wunst in the legislatur'."

"Yas," Lige rejoined, "an' he wuz 'cused of takin' a bribe."

"It wuz the Radicals that 'cused him, Big Lige, an'

yer mus' rickerleck that the Radicals will 'cuse anybody."

"I know that, an' it wouldn't been so bad in Jim Polk Brezentine's case ef they hadenter proved it on him."

"Wall, wall," wheezed the old man, "don't let us argy. He's smart ernuff to make er livin' fur Millie, an' that's all I ken ask."

At dinner Mrs. Petticord, seeking an opportunity, drew Lige aside and said:

"Big Lige, did you say dam pore?"

"Yessum."

"Wall, I want yer ter un'erstan' that it ain't none uv yer business. It's a mother's duty ter have er gentleman in ther family, an' it ain't none uv yer look-out. Do yer hear that, Big Lige?"

"I ain't never been 'cused uv bein' deaf."

"Wall, then, I want yer ter mark it."

The night of the marriage arrived. Extensive preparations had been made. Scott Patterson came with his fiddle; Sim Bumpus came with his jokes; 'Squire Boyle came with solemn authority.

"Let's us stan' up with 'em?" said Sallie Patterson, approaching Big Lige, who sat on a bench near the door.

"No, I am obleeged ter yer," Lige replied. "I'd ruther set when it's jest ez cheap."

"Think yer awful smart, don't yer?"

"What's the matter over thar?" Sim Bumpus asked.

"Nothin', only Big Lige thinks he's so awful smart."

"That's what they told me at the mill, but she kep' on a-grindin'," Mr. Bumpus rejoined.

Millie was arrayed in a bright calico dress. Her hair hung loose. Brezentine wore a cheap suit of "town stuff." When the ceremony was over Big Lige, with the rest, shook hands with the bride and groom; then Mr. Patterson shouted, "Git yer podners, gentlemen, fur a curtilyun." During the night, which was festive, Big Lige was not surly; and, although he did not dance, he took his turn at the fiddle while Scott Patterson "swung cornders" with the girls from over the creek.

The next day after the wedding Brezentine and his wife began to keep house on a little farm which old Petticord had portioned off for them. The distance was but short, and Millie came over to her old home every day. Big Lige conceived the idea that she was not happy. He wondered and wondered what the cause could be. After awhile he was enlightened.

Brezentine was a drunkard. At first Millie tried to guard this as a secret, but it soon became too plain to admit of further attempt at concealment. The poor girl seemed to be nearly heartbroken, and her father and mother, realizing that they had made a mistake in so readily giving their consent to the marriage, endeavored to make the best of it. Sometimes, even when the weather was cold, Brezentine would leave home without having cut any wood, and, not infrequently, Big Lige, who often strolled over in the direction of the son-in-law's house, would cheerfully perform the work which the husband had neglected. Once Mrs. Petticord acknowledged that Brezentine was not even "fit to tote water." The old man sighed disconsolately, but Big Lige, who sat near, scraping a powder-

horn, remarked that every man should have a chance, and that it was not right to condemn him without a fair trial.

"Big Lige, yer talk like yer ain't got no sense," Mrs. Petticord snapped. "A month or so ago yer 'lowed he wa'n't fittin' fur nuthin' but ter tote water, an' now yer wanten take up fur him. I 'spise to see a man so shifty."

"Wall, wall," said the old man, "don't let's argy 'bout it. Yer wuz on yer head, mur, tell yer got her married off, an' now yer air on yer head 'case yer p'int wuz gained. I never seed such a thing ez a woman, nohow. One day yer think yer kain't live with her, an' the next day yer know yer kain't."

"Pap, fur the Lawd's sake don't fuss. Yer put me in min' uv a settin' hen a-peckin' at everything that comes a-nigh. Thar ain't nothin' that'll please yer, nothin' at all, nothin' on ther face uv the Lawd'l-mighty's yeath."

"Wall, wall, we won't argy," replied Mr. Petticord. "'Pears ter me like it's all argyin' an' no work roun' this yere house. I never" —

Millie burst into the room. "Oh, pap!" she exclaimed, "they've come an' tuck Jim Polk!"

"Whut's the matter, gal?" the old man cried. "Mur, git outen the way an' quit yer foolishness." Mrs. Petticord had thrown her arms around Millie.

"I won't git away," she snapped. "Don't yer see the pore child's about ter faint?"

"Anybody'd faint bein' squuz that erway. Turn her leose. Now, Millie," he added, when Mrs. Petticord

had released the girl, "tell us who's tuck him an' whut they tuck him fur."

"The constable come an' got him. They 'cuse him uv stealin' er-hunnerd dollars from Steve Dye, an' they've tuck him ter ther cross-roads. Oh, Big Lige, won't yer please go an' see whut they're goin' ter do with him?"

Lige arose, without uttering a word, and started out. The old man told him to catch the bay mare and ride, but he heeded not the suggestion.

"This is a putty kittle uv fish," the giant mused, as he strode along the road. "I know in reason that he's guilty. Pore Millie! She driv her ducks ter a mighty bad market."

When he arrived at the cross-roads he found a crowd of men gathered about the door of a log house which served as a jail. Sim Bumpus and Scott Patterson stood guard at the door. Lige was suffered to enter. Brezentine sat on a box. His face wore an expression of despair.

"How are you, Lige?"

Lige nodded.

"You find me in a pretty bad fix," Brezentine remarked as he shoved his hands into his pockets and leaned back against the wall. "If they send me to the penitentiary, it will almost kill Millie with shame, and it will be a disgrace to the Petticord family. I wish I was dead."

"So do I," Big Lige replied.

"Don't be too hard on me."

"I don't want ter be hard on yer a-tall. It's fur Millie's sake that I wish yer wuz dead. She could

stan' grief better'n she ken disgrace. Jim Polk Brezentine, I b'lieve yer ought ter be in prison, fur I don't b'lieve God ever put a hones' bone in yer body; but fur Millie's sake, an' fur the sake uv a ole man an' ole woman that I love, I won't see yer go ter the pen."

"How can you help it?"

"I'll tell 'em that I stold the money."

"Oh, Lige!" exclaimed Brezentine, springing to his feet. "Oh, you noble" ——

"Don't put yer damned han's on me! Set down thar, ur I'll slam the daylight outen yer."

Lige opened the door and called Patterson. "Scott," said he, "I wush yer'd go over an' tell 'Squire Boyle ter come here."

Scott hurried away and soon returned, accompanied by the justice of the peace.

"W'y, how're yer, Big Lige? How's all the folks?" the magistrate asked, as he shook hands with Lige.

"All's well. 'Squire, yer've got the wrong sow by the year, this time. I'm the man that stold Dye's money."

"What?" exclaimed the 'squire.

"I say that I'm the man."

"Wall, then, how come Jim Polk with the money?"

"I owed it to him, an' I gin it to him shortly airtter I stold it."

"Jim Polk Brezentine, is that so?"

"It is a fact, 'squire. When I was accused of taking the money, I could have told where I got it, but I did not want to involve my friend Lige, and, sir, if he

had not confessed it, I would have said nothing, but would have let them send me to the penitentiary."

"Mr. Brezentine," said the 'squire, "give me yer han'. I didn't know, when the folks called yer no 'count an' triffin', that there wuz so much grit in yer. Give me yer han'."

Jim Polk and the 'squire warmly shook hands. Big Lige shuddered and turned his back. "Lige," said the 'squire, "as yer confessed, thar ain't no use in a preliminary trial before me. The circuit cou't is now in session, an' I'd better send yer down right away ter be tried. Mr. Brezentine, yer can go home, sir."

"Wall, wall," said old man Petticord, when Brezentine had related Lige's confession, "I never woulder b'lieved that he wuz a thief. What is ther worl' a comin' ter?"

"Comin' ter a eend mighty fast," replied his wife, as she ceased rattling her knitting-needles and gazed thoughtfully into the fire. "Pore Lige!"

That evening, as Brezentine and his wife were walking toward home, Millie said:

"Pore Lige. I thought he was one of the bes' men in the worl'."

"If he's guilty, an' he certainly is, what is the use of pitying him? You think more of him than you do of me, anyway."

"Jim Polk, what's the use of talkin' that way?"

"Well, you do."

"Now, Jim Polk"—

"Oh, shut up. You are sorry now that I didn't go on trial in his place. I am getting sick of hearing you talk of him."

Lige's trial consumed but little time, as there was no pretense of defense. Old man Petticord was in the court-room when Big Lige received his sentence of two years in the penitentiary. The old man seized the giant's hand and wept like a child.

"My dear ole frien'," said Lige, "think uv me ez well ez yer ken, fur thar will come er time — but no matter. Tell 'em all at home that I love 'em. Tell 'em that I would die fur 'em. Tell Millie that — that — she mustn't think too hard uv poor Lige. Good-by, an' God bless yer."

III.

A year slowly dragged itself away. Every night, when the weather was cool, old man Petticord placed a pile of corn in the corner where Big Lige's chair had always stood. People said that Millie was dying of a broken heart, because her husband persisted in throwing himself away. Brezentine would not work, and many a morning, when the snow lay deep on the ground, old man Petticord was seen carrying meat and corn-meal to his daughter and her worthless husband.

One evening in December old man Petticord and his wife sat by the great log fire. The pile of corn was in its place, and the great chair, with its raw-hide bottom, stood in the corner.

"Last Chris'mus Big Lige wuz with us," said the old man.

"Yas," his wife responded, "an' I wush he wuz with us now. Somehow I never did think he wuz guilty. He allus loved Millie, an' " —

"Wall, wall," said the old man, "why the hell didn't you let her marry him? Hush now, hush. We won't argy. We've been livin' together too long ter argy at this late day. Who's that at the door? Come in. Why, it's Scott Patterson. Come in, Scott."

"I've got some putty bad news," said Patterson, as he advanced and placed his hands on the back of a chair. "Jes' airter dinner terday Jim Polk Brezentine come out ter the cross-roads an' got putty full. Long toward evenin', he got on his mule an' galloped off, but he hadn't gone fur tell the mule flung him agin a tree. We tuck him home, an' the doctor says he kain't git well. Yer'd all better come 'over ter his house."

They hurried over to Brezentine's house. The wretched man, moaning and groaning, was, the physician said, beyond all hope. When the medical man told him that he could live but a few hours longer, he howled like a wild beast.

"Oh, God will send my soul to hell," he cried. "Millie, Millie, come here. Lige did not steal the money. I stole it, and he went to the penitentiary to shield you. God forgive me for" —

He became speechless. Tears streamed down Petticord's face, but they were not in sympathy for Brezentine. Mrs. Petticord, taking Millie into her arms, whispered :

"B'ar up ez well ez yer ken. The Lord will bring all things right."

A profound sensation was created when the people heard of Brezentine's confession, and when they turned

away from a new grave in an old orchard one of the Dye boys remarked :

“ I never throwed dirt on a triffin’er man.”

Thenight was bitterly cold. It was the night before Christmas, and “ old Quinzy ” Petticord, his wife and his daughter sat by the blazing fire. Millie had just placed Lige’s chair in its accustomed position, when the old man remarked :

“ I reckon that pertition wesent down ter the guv’ner will do ther work. He kain’t keep Big Lige in thar a day ainter he knows the truth. Now, Millie, don’t cry ’round here. I ’spise ter see people a-snuffin’. I know in reason he—open the door, Millie ; don’t yer hear somebody ? ”

Millie opened the door. Big Lige stepped into the room. The old man seized the giant ; the old woman, as her husband afterward remarked, fluttered like a duck, and Millie, after she had shaken hands with Lige, wiped her eyes on her apron and took her old seat, just across the hearth from Lige’s chair. Lige sat down, took up an ear of corn, as though he had just come in from the stable, and began to shell it.

“ Millie,” the old woman cried, as she wiped her eyes, “ go an’ fix Lige’s supper, fur I know he ain’t had nuthin’ ter eat sence he left here. Pore Lige ! ”

“ Don’t pity me,” Lige replied.

“ Why,” the old man asked, “ ain’t they nearly worked yer ter death down thar ? ”

“ Shar, no ; it wa’n’t no trouble a-tall to keep up with them fellers.”

“ While Millie’s gettin’ supper ready let me tell yer the news,” said the old man. “ Sim Bumpus an’ Sallie

Patterson is married. 'Squire Boyle is down with the rheumatiz. He has been on the lift for three months. We have been all well, 'cept myself. I've been putty stretchy a time or two, but I ain't been bed-sick sence yer left us. Thank God, Big Lige, that yer air with us wunst more. I reckon Millie's got yer snack about ready. All she had ter do wuz ter put it on ther table. Come."

"Big Lige," said the old woman, as the giant arose from his seat, "I couldn't think no mo' uv yer ef yer was my natril borned son."

Six months had passed. Big Lige, who would not permit himself to be a hero, avoided company, shelled his corn and made his collars for the work-horses. Old man Petticord was happy again, and the old lady, constantly requested not to "argy," seemed not to have ever had a moment of trouble.

It was Saturday, and the old man and his wife had gone to "meetin'" down at the ford. Big Lige sat in the "big room," engaged in making a new bottom for a chair. Millie came in from the kitchen. She looked at Lige and blushed. The giant became confused.

"Oh, Big Lige," said the girl, "let me tell you something awful."

She knelt down on the floor beside him and said:

"Long time ago a person done me an' yerse'f a great wrong. One day when we killed hogs Sallie Patterson told me that you said this to her: 'Sallie, Millie loves me, an' ef she don't marry me she will die; but I don't kere — I am goin' ter ask her, an' when she says yes I am goin' ter laugh' — wait till I get through — 'in her

face. She allus has been tryin' ter ketch me. Then when yer asked me, Big Lige, I couldn't he'p but say: 'No, I thanks yer.' "

"Did Sallie say that?"

"Yas, she did."

"I wish she wuz a man. Ef she wuz ez big ez Samson I could slam her agin the face of the yeath."

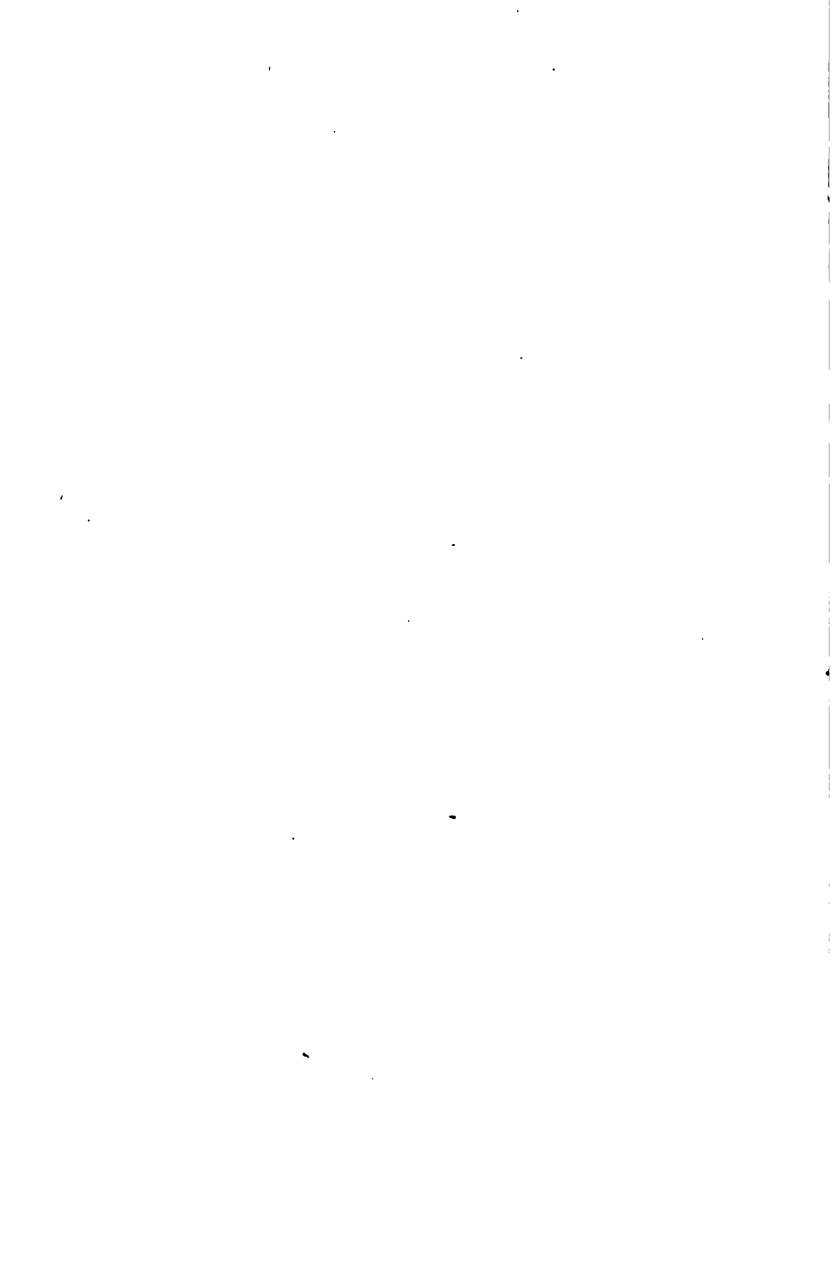
"Oh, Lige," she said, clasping her hands, "won't yer furgive me?"

"Angel," he said, as he took her in his arms, "I ain't got nothin' ter furgive. I would die fur yer."

"Lige, I have loved yer ever sence I wuz a little gal, but I thought yer hated me."

When the old man and the old woman returned they found two happy souls; and when Lige said, "We air goin' ter git married," the old couple, with one voice, exclaimed: "Thank the Lawd!"

He Was a Bronson.



HE WAS A BRONSON.

I.

THE first thing I clearly remember was hearing my father declare that he would kill Sam Olney. We lived in Virginia, far from any town. Between our family and the Olneys there existed a deadly feud, and though I could not, even after hearing my father's declaration, comprehend the full significance of the threat, yet I went to bed in an uneasy state of mind that night, and upon awaking early the next morning I asked my mother if father had killed Sam Olney. She bade me hush. I can see her pale face now.

"I am afraid something awful is going to happen," she said, "but you mustn't say a word about it. For a long time a deadly hatred — but you cannot understand it."

I urged her to tell me more, but she would not. After breakfast I asked my father, and, without showing the least sign of fear, he told me that the Olneys were wolves, and that God made them to be killed; and when I asked him why God did not kill them, he laughed, tossed me up, and answered:

"Because he wanted to give the Bronsons that pleasure."

There had been, I soon learned, several conflicts between the Bronsons and the Olneys, and my

grandfather and two of my uncles had been killed by them. Sam Olney, one of the most desperate of the gang, and indeed the only surviving one, had left the community immediately after the last fight, and his sudden reappearance had again opened up the feud.

A long time must have passed since I had heard my father's threat, and Olney must have left the neighborhood again, for I had grown to be quite a large boy, when, one day, my father called me and said :

"Milton, I want to talk to you. Come out to the stable. I don't want your mother to hear me. Now," he said, when we had reached the stable, "I am going out to-day to kill Sam Olney."

"I wish I could kill him," I remember to have answered.

"Brave boy," he said, stooping down and kissing me, "brave boy! Oh, you are a true Bronson, and I know that if Olney should kill me, you would, after awhile, kill him and all his accursed race. God has made a great difference between those people and us, my son, and it is not a sin to kill them. Your mother is afraid that I shall get hurt, and if she should ask you if you know where I am, tell her no."

"I will."

He rode away, carrying a gun with him, and I went back to the house, grieving because I was not large enough to go with him.

"Milton, where is your father?" my mother asked.

"I don't know."

"Didn't you go out to the stable with him this morning?"

"No."

"Milton"—— She took me in her arms and wept.

Night came. Hour after hour mother stood in the door, holding a light. She bade me go to bed; I would not, but stood near her. Sometimes we would walk down to the gate, and then, coming back disappointed, would resume our weary watch, mother holding the light.

"Let us walk up the road," she said.

She went in advance, holding the light high above her head. How like an angel she looked, the darkness parting to let her pass.

We had reached the bend of the road, nearly half a mile from the house, when a gust of wind blew out the light.

"Let us go back," she said. "Wait a moment. What noise is that?"

"It is a wagon," I answered.

The wagon came down the hill and passed us.

"Let us go back," mother said.

We went down the hill, following the wagon. Suddenly she broke away from me and ran toward home. I soon knew the cause. The wagon had passed through our gate. I heard mother scream, and when I reached the door two men were helping father out of the wagon.

"Don't be scared now," he said. "I'm not hurt much. Be all right in a day or two."

They took him into the house. "Lay me on Milton's lounge," he said.

"Oh, no, Emmett," mother pleaded, "let us put you on the bed. Lay him here," she said, beginning to arrange the pillows. The men were about to obey, when, in a strong voice, he demanded:

"Put me on Milton's lounge!"

They did so. Mother sank on her knees beside him. One of the men, a doctor, drew her aside and said something to her.

"What did you tell her?" father asked.

"Nothing, except that you may be out in a day or two."

"What became of my gun?"

"It is in the wagon."

"Bring it here!"

"Oh, no, Emmett, not to-night," mother pleaded.

"They will take it out of the wagon now, but" —

"Bring that gun."

The gun was brought.

"Milton," said my father, "this gun will be yours."

I stood with the gun leaning against my breast.

"I want you to take this gun wherever you go — where is my knife?" he suddenly broke off.

"Here," said the doctor, handing it to him.

"Milton, take this knife, too," father continued, "and wear it, and never go away from home without that gun, and whenever you see an Olney shoot him."

"I will."

"Swear it — wait. Bring me a pen and ink and some paper."

"Emmett," mother began to plead, but he demanded obedience. "Now, prop me up in bed," said he. They obeyed, and, placing the paper on a school atlas, he wrote the following:

"I, Milton Bronson, do to my dying father swear and hope to God that I may forever burn in hell if I do not kill or try to kill Sam Olney whenever I find him,

and that if I ever find any of his near relatives I will kill them."

"You can write your name, can't you, Milton?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Then sign this."

"Emmett, read it, please," mother asked. He read the words, and I signed the paper. Mother stood sobbing, with her face hidden in her hands.

"Anna, don't be frightened," said father. "I am not going to die now, and only drew up this paper as a sort of will. Everybody go to bed now. Doctor, if you think it necessary you may come again in the morning."

He did come again the next morning, and for many mornings afterward, but father grew no better. Mother was a deeply religious woman, and one day she sent for a preacher. Father, who was so weak he could scarcely talk, greeted him kindly. The preacher took a seat near my lounge — father would never consent to be moved — and began to talk of the wickedness of this world, and of the necessity of forgiving here if we hoped to be forgiven hereafter.

"That may be true," father answered.

"Then can you not forgive the man who shot you?"

"No, sir; that would be the weakness of a fool instead of the generosity of a man."

"And can you hope for mercy in heaven if you show none here?"

"Mercy," said my father, "is shown to those who are in our power. Do you see any one in my power?"

"Yes," the preacher answered, and he pointed to

me. Father frowned. "That boy is in your power, Mr. Bronson," the preacher continued. "You have on him a cruel grasp that you are not willing death should release. You want to make vengeance his aim in life. Release him."

My father looked at me and said: "Milton, you are a true Bronson."

"Yes, sir."

"Where is the paper you signed?"

"I have put it away where no one can find it."

"What are you going to do with it?"

"I am going to read it every day."

"And when you are a man" —

"I am going to kill Sam Olney."

My father, uttering a cry of delight, held his hands out toward me. Mother stood near, weeping.

"Mr. Bronson," said the preacher, "you are an educated man, a man of books and refinement. If you were ignorant I should not be surprised, but as it is I am shocked. Do you believe in God?"

"I do," father answered, "and that God in whom I believe said, 'Vengeance is mine.'"

"Yes, He said that vengeance was His, not yours — not your son's."

"God deals no vengeance except with an instrument," father replied.

"Do you believe that God gave His Son to the world to suffer and die for mankind?"

"Yes; but the most important factor in that transaction — Judas — was tortured by a burning conscience until he hanged himself, and ever since that time he has been held up as the most despicable of all men."

"Ah, but Christ forgave even those who tortured Him."

"Yes; for His mission was one of peace and forgiveness."

"Well, and contemplating that divine mission, can you not forgive?"

"No; I am not immortal."

"But you hope to be."

"Not an immortal who forgives the Olneys."

"And you intend to die thus?"

"I do."

"Suppose you should be damned?"

"Then I should be rewarded by seeing the Olneys suffer."

"Sister Bronson," said the preacher, turning to my mother, "it is of no use to talk to him."

A dark and stormy night came, and when the storm had blown away my father's soul was gone. We buried him under a tree near the house, and, unobserved, I often sat beneath the tree that sheltered the mound and read my oath. Mother, many and many a time, besought me to burn the paper, but I always answered, "I am a Bronson." She had never been very strong, and gradually she went into a decline. I loved her dearly — I worshiped her — but I could not forswear my oath. A voice from the grave bade me keep it.

Mother grew weaker day by day, and when the weather was pleasant she and I would sit together at the grave.

Ah, how vivid is the memory of our last visit to the tree that sheltered the grave. The night was black;

and now, when such a night comes, I fancy that it is the despairing and damned soul of a once bright day.

We were sitting by the fire, mother and I. The day had been wild, and the few showers of rain that had fallen seemed as tears wrung in agony from the clouds. I could see that she was even weaker than she had been the day before.

"Milton," she said, "I cannot be with you much longer."

"Don't talk that way, mother."

"We should face the truth, my son. I do not fear to die, but" —

"But what, mother?"

She leaned over, put her arms about my neck, and said:

"My son, it almost breaks my heart to think that I shall die and leave you determined to keep your awful oath."

I said nothing. Her tears were upon my cheeks.

"Milton, why don't you speak?"

"Because I do not know what to say, mother."

"Say something, my darling."

"I am a Bronson," I replied.

She arose with difficulty, and, taking down the lamp, told me to follow her. We went out into the night and turned toward the grave of my father. She carried the light high above her head. How like an angel she looked, the darkness parting to let her pass. One week from that night I went to the tree again. There were two graves under it.

II.

I was taken by a distant relative to be educated. He knew nothing of the Olneys, and when I begged him to let me take my gun with me, he declared that we could not carry it so long a distance. I wept bitterly, but he would not yield. But I had the knife, and I had my oath.

Then came my school days and then my days at college. I had studied hard and had read many books, but I was a Bronson still. I wore my oath in an inner pocket of my undershirt, next to my heart, and I carried the knife no matter whither I went. I had no particular aim in life—that is, with regard to what calling I should follow. Everything was subservient to the fulfillment of my vow. A voice from the grave was constantly sounding in my ears. I wrote to a friend who lived near my old home and asked if Sam Olney were still alive. He answered that Olney had long ago left the neighborhood and that no one knew whither he had gone. Several weeks later I received a letter from my friend telling me that Sam Olney had recently been killed in California.

After this I became more cheerful, though for a time I regretted that I had not killed the slayer of my father.

I studied law and was admitted to the bar. There was but little business in our quiet town, and when one day I received a letter from a former fellow-student, telling me to come to Kentucky and take a partnership with him, I immediately decided to go. I went as far as I could by rail, and then bought a horse

and set out across the country. One night, when I was within twenty-five miles of the town where I was to settle, a furious rainstorm burst upon me. There was no shelter to be found, and as it was more dangerous to turn aside into the woods than to stay in the road, I continued to fight my way, though the road was exceedingly rough. I remember that my horse stumbled violently. Then all was a blank until I saw a girl standing near me. I was in a house. The girl, noticing my look of inquiring astonishment, said :

"We found you in the road where your horse had fallen and brought you here. That was night before last. Do you feel very bad?"

"I don't feel very well," I answered. "Has a doctor seen me?"

"Yes."

"Did he say I was very badly hurt?"

"Yes. Several of your ribs and your right leg are broken."

She was a lovely creature. Her beauty made me forget my injuries, and as I feasted my eyes upon her, she blushed.

"Father has gone to the mill, but will be back soon," she said. "I—we were very anxious to find out your name, but we couldn't find anything at all in your pockets or valise. Father said that it wouldn't do for a man like you to die—you looked so strong and could be of so much use in the world. He is a great admirer of strong men."

"What is your father's name?" I asked.

She told me, and then asked my name. "My name is William Johnson," I answered. Why did I tell her

a lie? Her father's name was Sam Olney. I closed my eyes.

"You have not asked my name," she said.

"What is it?" I asked, without opening my eyes.

"Mary," she answered. "Do you want anything?"

"No," I replied, still with my eyes closed; "nothing except to be quiet."

"Sam Olney!" I mused. "How fortunate that I did not carry my name with me! But where is my oath"—I was startled. "No, here it is, with a revengeful heart beating against it." My father's very words rang in my ears. Would I keep my oath? I would. The beauty of an angel could not swerve me. I would stay with Sam Olney until I was well, and then, telling him my name, I would cut out his heart with my father's knife. Should I stop at that? No. In the meantime I would win his daughter's love, if I could, and by killing her father and spurning her, break her heart.

I opened my eyes and looked about the room. Just then I heard her voice, and then there came heavy footsteps in the hall. I pressed my hand—my oath was under it—to my heart.

A tall man, rather old, entered the room. "How are you getting along?" said he, seating himself near my bed. I would win his friendship and then kill him.

"Very well," I answered. "Your kindness"—

"There, now, don't mention that. My daughter tells me that your name is Johnson."

"Yes, sir, William Johnson."

"Are you related to the Johnsons that live in Orange County, Virginia?"

I knew them well. One of them was the friend to whom I had written regarding the whereabouts of Sam Olney, but I answered :

"No, sir. My people are from North Carolina."

"Don't you feel as if you might eat a little something? Mary has a quail fixed for you."

I lay that night gloating over my coming vengeance. The luscious fruit of revenge was ripening within my very grasp. I dozed off, and awoke with a cry. I had, I thought, plunged my knife into the old man's heart, and had seen the girl, after kneeling at my feet, stab herself.

"Can I do anything for you, Mr. Johnson?"

It was Sam Olney's voice. He had heard my cry and had come into the room.

"No, I thank you."

"Are you suffering much?"

"No; I have been dreaming."

"Whenever you want anything call me."

The days wore along, and oh, that girl's beauty almost maddened me at times. One night I dreamed that I caught her in my arms and pressed her to my bosom. My oath took fire and burned up, and then I thought my soul caught fire, and then, howling, I ran through the woods. Ah, how gentle she was — but I hated her.

One day — I was now able to sit up — she sat near me, reading.

"I am forgetting to win her love," I mused, and then, waiting until she glanced up at me, which I knew she would do, I said:

"Do you find your book so very entertaining?"

"No; it is positively stupid. It is all about such good, tiresome people. Good people in real life may be well enough, but in a book they are intolerable. If I were to write a book I would have my characters quarrel and fight."

"And kill one another?" I asked.

"Yes, some of them should die. But I would have no murders. I would have them killed fairly."

"May I ask how old you are?"

"Yes. I am seventeen."

Her father had killed mine before she was born.

"Do I look older?" she mischievously asked.

"We cannot estimate the age of a diamond by looking at it," I said, and then gloated over her blushes. She went out into the yard, and I heard her singing as she drove the cows into the lot.

Old Sam Olney would often sit up late, talking to me. He was not an ignorant man, and he was inclined to be imaginative. So much the better. His soul would tremble when, just before stabbing him, I should say: "I am a Bronson."

"Soon as you get able to walk we will go hunting," the old man said one night. "Can you shoot?"

"I am not a good shot," I answered, "but I can pull a trigger."

"All right. I will let you take a gun that has done some good work in its day—a gun that saved my life once. A man was trying to kill me, and his gun snapped. Mine didn't. That was a long time ago, but I love that old gun for its work, not so much that it saved my life, but because it took his. Are you ill? Mary, bring a glass of water."

The days wore along, and I was now able to walk, but I did not go hunting. I did not want to see that gun. Once I thought, "I will take it out and kill him with it," but then I thought that the knife would be better, would inspire more terror when his startled eyes should catch its gleam of death.

I could not tell the girl that I loved her, for, in attempting to caress her, I verily believe that I should have choked her to death. Had my vow maddened me to insanity?

One evening I said to myself: "To-morrow morning I will kill him. Early at morning I will go into his room and awake him with a startling exclamation." I had read my oath over and over of late — had gazed at the paper while sitting in the woods, although every word of it was written on my heart.

I can never forget that night. I do not want to forget it. I sat on a log in the woods. The day had been cold and cloudy. Suddenly I became aware of sweetest and softest music. I looked up, startled. Snow was falling on the dead leaves. Long I sat there, soothed and softened by that music. Oh, what an appeal to the soul! I returned to the house. Everything was quiet. I went to my room and sat down in the dark. I still heard the music of the snow. "My God!" I suddenly thought, "am I losing my mind?" I heard some one outside. I looked out of the window, and saw Mary walking in the snow-feathered darkness, carrying a light high above her head. I thought of my mother, and in a gasp I breathed of Mary: "How like an angel, the darkness dividing to let her pass."

"I cannot find him," I heard her say to herself

when she stepped into the hallway, separated by a thin partition from the window where I stood. She had been carrying the light looking for me.

I lay down, but did not try to sleep. Would I keep my oath? Yes, at daylight. I dozed off to sleep, though I tried not to, and when I awoke my cheeks were wet.

"I will keep my oath though it tear my own heart out," I said, as I arose. I walked up and down the room, softly, for the old man slept in the next room. I sat down at the window and looked out. The clouds were gone; the moon was shining, but I still heard the music of the snow. The flakes, warm instead of cold, seemed to be falling on my heart. I would not yield. I closed my eyes to shut out the brightness of the moon, and then fancy threw a picture before me—my mother and old Sam Olney's daughter, carrying lights high above their heads, looking for me.

"O father," I groaned, sinking upon my knees, "take back the awful paper you bade me sign. I cannot keep my oath, father. If you are in heaven"—I shuddered. "If you are in heaven, or any spirit world, and have influence, you may tell the powers that rule there to send me to an endless torment, but I cannot commit murder. You tried to kill this man—you sought him and snapped your gun at him, and then he killed you. I will destroy the oath."

I put down my knife—I had held it all night—and thrust my hand into my bosom. The paper was gone. Just then I heard a mumbling sound in the adjoining room. I crept to the door, opened it just a little, and listened. The old man was praying.

"O God," he said, "I have sworn to kill them all, but I cannot. Here before me is his oath." I started and then peered into the room. Daylight was coming through his window, and on the floor beside him, where he knelt, there lay a piece of paper.

"O God," the old man continued, "he came here under an assumed name, and while he sat in the woods I heard him swear that he would kill me this morning. Then I thought that I would kill him, but I cannot. My daughter loves him; she sought him last night, to beg him to go away, and came back thinking that he was gone. Lord, I will not kill him, but he will be in here to kill me. I" — .

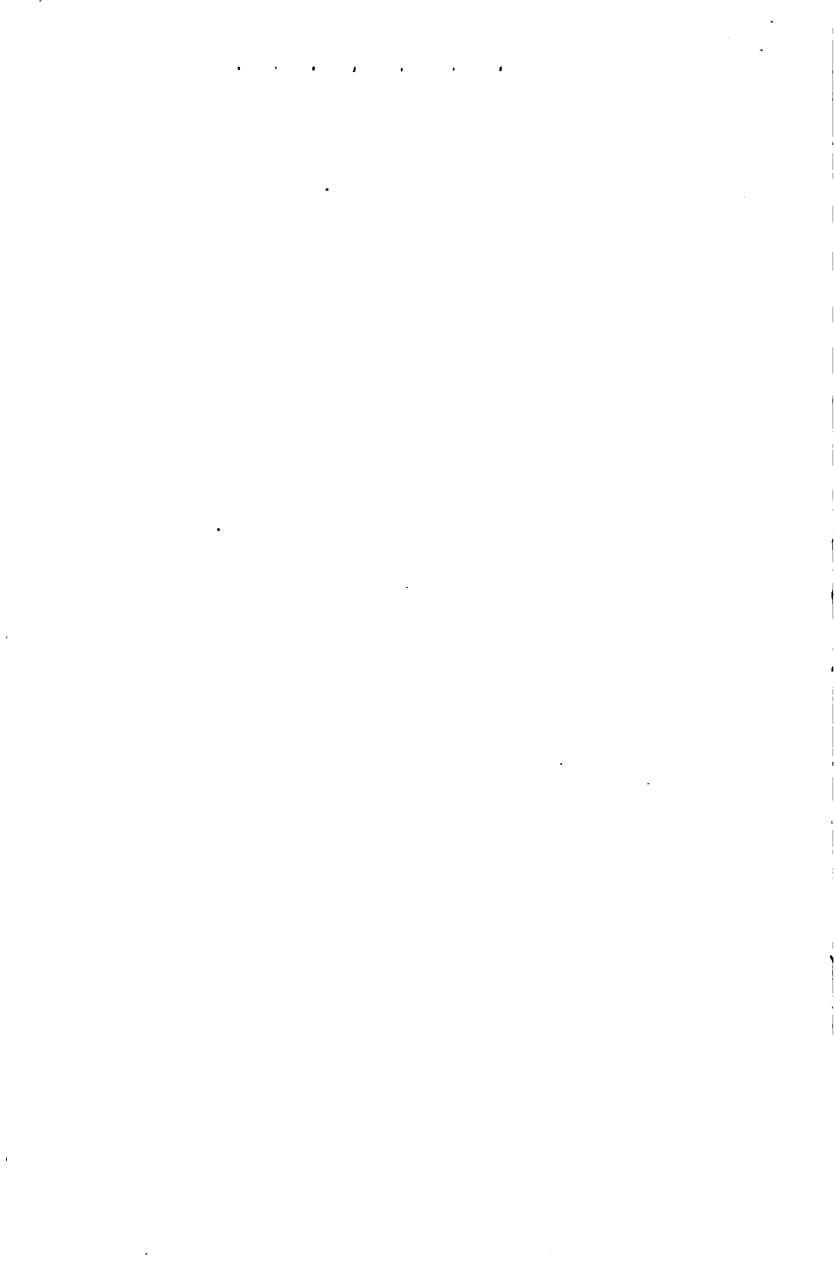
He arose. "An old man's prayer is a silly thing," he said. "I don't know how to pray, but I will not kill him."

"Mr. Olney," I said, stepping into the room. He gazed at me without astonishment, without emotion. "Mr. Olney," I said, holding out my hand. He seized it, drew me toward him, and, pointing to the sitting-room, said, "Mary."

I opened the door of the sitting-room. Mary was kneeling beside a chair.

"Angel!" I cried. She sprang toward me, and I caught her in my arms. Sun-rays fell in at the window. It was Christmas morning.

He Was Amusing.



HE WAS AMUSING.

B. WORTHINGTON BIBBS represents an English syndicate that has recently established a number of saw-mills near the imaginary line running between Arkansas and the Indian Territory. Several days ago, while Mr. Bibbs was attempting to go, on horseback, from one mill to another, he lost his way in the "deep tangled wildwood," and, after many hours of blind wandering, came upon an old fellow sitting on a log. His face wore an expression of comical laziness.

"Ah, my good man," said Bibbs, "will you tell me the road to one of the Albion saw-mills?"

"Which one?" the old fellow asked, looking up and squinting at the Englishman.

"Oh, it makes no difference whatever, I assure you."

"Then I don't reckon it makes any difference which road you take."

"Ah, now, you are very, very amusing."

"Yas, so is a frog."

"Well, now, really, I never noticed that, but since you have mentioned it, I doubt not that you are right. There are a great many things in nature that we never really notice until our attention is called to them, you know."

"Yas, an' that's whut the circuit jedge 'lowed, but the gran' jury kep' on a-fetchin' in the indictments."

"Ah," said the Englishman, adjusting his eyeglass and giving the squatter a searching look of inquiry.

"Reckon it is," said the squatter.

"Beg pardon, but what did you say?"

"W'y, you 'lowed 'ah,' an' I say I reckon it is."

"Yes, ah, very amusing, I assure you. Now, will you tell me the way to ither one of those mills?"

"Ain't got time."

"Why, it would not take long, I assure you."

"Wall, ef you know more about it than I do, you'd better go on."

"Well, now, really, this is extraordinary."

"Yas, that's whut the jedge 'lowed, but the jury fotch in a verdict of guilty."

"Well, well, you are the most amusing man I ever met, but I do wish you would give me the information I seek. Which road shall I take?"

"Do you see any road?"

"No, I ——"

"Wall, then, how air you goin' ter take it?"

"Upon my word, you are exceedingly peculiar. How long have you lived in this community?"

"Come here when Nan was a baby."

"How old is Nan? permit me to ask."

"Wall, ef she hadn'ter died she'd 'a' been older than Betsy."

"Pray tell me how old Betsy is?"

"Not quite as old as Nan would 'a' been."

"Upon my word, you are an extraordinary man. You are a farmer, I presume."

"Kain't say I am."

"What is your calling, then?"

"Call hogs sometimes, an' sometimes I don't call nothin'."

"What do you do for a living?"

"Eat sometimes, an' then ag'in I drink."

"Well, I must say you are the most peculiar man I ever met."

"Neenter say it unless you want to. Ain't nobody a-shovin' you."

"Well, well," said the Englishman, giving him another searching look, "I am somewhat interested in you."

"Yas, that's what the wild turkey said when she picked up the June bug."

"Ha, ha, quite a fable, I assure you. But come, now, tell me the way to the mill."

"Which one?"

"Ither."

"What's that?"

"I say ither."

"Reckon you'd better go on. Man come 'round here last fall an' said ither, an' the fust thing we know'd he'd done run away with a hoss."

"Well, did I ever hear the like!"

"Don't know as you have. Don't know what you've hearn. Ain't never run with you none."

"Well, now, joking aside"——

"Ain't jokin' a side nur a back, nuther."

"Well, then, aside from joking, will you tell me the way to ither one of those mills?"

"Come around some other time. I'm busy now."

"Look here, my good fellow, you are getting to be provoking."

"Yas, that's wut the lizard 'lowed when the saw-log was drug over him."

The Englishman sought an easier position in his saddle, looked at the squatter, frowned perplexedly and then said:

"I have come here for the good of the community. I"——

"Whur air you frum?"

"London, England."

"Which side of the railroad is it on?"

"Well, upon my soul!"

For several minutes afterward the Briton could say nothing more, and during his silence he seemed to be wondering whether or not to proclaim the old fellow a fool. After awhile, appearing to have resolved to make another effort, he said: "I have come here for the good of the community and really deserve better treatment, even at the hands of an irresponsible native."

"Reckon you'll make more money outen the neighborhood than I will," the squatter replied. "You come in here and crowd the neighborhood."

"Crowd the neighborhood?" the Englishman exclaimed.

"Yas, that's whut you air doin'. All my life I have been crowded. Some time ago I lived way over yander" (waving his arm). "Was gittin' along fust-rate till one mornin' I woke up an' found that another fellow had moved in."

"He didn't move into your house?"

"No, but he settled down not more'n five mile from me an' skeered the deer. I went to him an' axed him ter apologize, an' he wouldn't do it, an' then, rather then ter be crowded, I left."

"I must say that you are the most amusing man I ever saw."

"Then I don't reckon you know'd my brother Bill."

"I did not."

"Wall, now, he was amusin', sho nuff. Ef you ain't in a hurry, I'll tell you about him."

"I am prepared to hear anything, I assure you."

"All right. Wall, one day me and brother Bill was out at the sto', an' a feller that was readin' suthin outen a paper, an' the drift of it was that Governor Henry was the strongest governor the State ever had. Bill didn't say nothin', but I seed that he was worried, an' that night, atter he went to bed, Bill he says, 'Alf'—that's me—'did you hear that feller read outen the paper that Governor Henry is the strongest governor the State ever had?' I 'lowed that I did. 'Wall,' says he, 'I don't like fur that sort of thing ter be flung 'round yo' uncle Fuller'—meanin' him—'fur you know I'm the strongest man thar is anywhar in this State, an' ef Henry thinks he's the strongest, w'y, he's got to prove it, that's all! I axed him what he was goin' ter do, an' he 'lowed that he wanted me ter go down ter Little Rock with him an' see the governor. I agreed, an' the next mornin' we hitched up ole Tom an' the gray mar' that we got frum the Posey boys, an' away we went. We was about three days on the road, but that didn't make no diffunce, fur Bih he had a good deal at stake, an' you bet I was

witL him. Wall, we got thar at last an' found out whar the governor roosted, an' we went thar. I was sorter skittish, but brother Bill he wa'n't, for he walked right up and axed a nigger whar the governor was. Then the nigger he grinned an' wanted to know our names, an' then Bill shoved him aside and walked right in, an' I went with him, for I was with Bill world without eend. We found the governor a-settin' with his feet up on the table, an' as soon as I laid eyes on him I seed that a mistake hed been made, fur he was lean an' dried-up an' wa'n't a patchin' compared ter Bill, an' he looked like he was sorry fur it, too; but that didn't make no diffunce to Bill, for he says, says he, 'Governor, I l'arn through the papers that you air the strongest governor the State ever had, an' I don't believe it, an' I stand here to take the part of old Governor Fulton, that was the friend of my gran'daddy, an' you bet he could lift more at a handspike than you can any day, an' I want you to understand it, an', fu'thermore, I want you to know that I am atter you right now.' Wall, the governor sorter laughed, an' says, 'Bill, I know you air a putty good man, an' I'll try you a few falls putty soon, but before we go into it let's try a little of this juice, the oldest you ever seed.' Wall, Bill he took his tobacker outen his mouth, an' the gov'nor tuck down a jug, an' then we all hit it, an' we kep' on a-hittin' it till atter while me an' Bill found it as much as we could do to stand up. But the gov'nor he kep' on a-smilin' an' a-pourin' it out, an' finally Brother Bill he says, 'Governor, I reckon that thing they printed about you was the truth. I am your friend, for I reckon you air stronger'n

me.' And Bill he drapped, an' I drapped, an', the governor he smiled and said he reckon it was about time he was pardonin' a feller that had stol'd a set of harness. An' so he did. Me an' Bill, soon as we was able, come "——

"What became of that remarkable man?" the Englishman asked.

"Wish you hadenter axed me that, fur it makes me sad. He fell in a sink-hole, an' me an' pap found him shortly atterwards. The hole was putty deep, but down thar stood Bill."

"You got him out, of course," said the Englishman.

"Wall, let me tell you. As I tell you, me an' pap found him, an' was just about to let down a rope to draw him out, when one of the dogs treed a coon. Wall, we'lowed that Bill would stay thar, an' we didn't know whuther the coon would er not; so we went atter the coon, an' when we come back we found that the sink-hole had caved in on Bill. We would 'a' dug him out, but pap—a mighty smart man, too—'lowed that it wa'n't no use to dig him out jest ter bury him ag'in, so we let him stay. Say, stranger, you axed me ef I would tell you the way ter one of them mills. Wall, you keep on a-goin', an' ef you don't come ter one of them you come back here an' call me a liar, an' I'll take it like a lamb takin' tender grass in the spring of the year. Good-by."

John and Jack.



JOHN AND JACK.

I.

YEARS ago I rented a farm in a not very thickly settled region of Arkansaw. I took with me, as a partner, John Daybloom. I have never known any one else of that name, and I have often thought that John took it up on account of its sound. John was a quiet sort of fellow, ordinarily, but at times his system demanded physical excitement. At certain periods John had to be accommodated with a fight. These attacks of pugnacity came upon him like spells of biliousness, and I don't know but his eccentricities in this way somewhat influenced me in engaging him as a partner, for report said that the Elkin boys, who lived near the farm I had rented, were customers of peculiar toughness. I could always get along pretty well without fighting, and I have been so careful of the feelings of others—to say nothing of my own feelings—that I have often crossed the street, yes, have often left town, to avoid hurting any one. John and I set out in a wagon. We had not proceeded far when John said:

“I'll tell you what's a fact, Tom Jackson, I don't feel comfortable.”

“What seems to be the matter?”

“One of my spells is coming on me.”

“I am sorry to hear that.”

"And I am sorry to know it," he rejoined, "for we'll soon be in a half-civilized, uneducated community, where a man can't find accommodations."

"I hope, John, that you can fight off a paroxysm until we git to the farm, for, judging from what I've heard, the Elkin boys are likely to meet us and demand some sort of an explanation."

This remark cheered him, and, taking the lines from me, he whipped the horses into a brisk trot. Occasionally during the day he would burst into a song, or, whistling dolefully, would seem to have fallen into a condition of contentment—a state of happiness which comes of fond expectancy; but at night, when the brightness of our fire died away, and when the horses, ceasing to munch their food with that sound so dear to some men, became quiet, John would become gloomy and morose.

Just before we reached our destination John said:

"Suppose those fellows are not there to meet us?"

"Oh, they'll be there," I encouragingly replied.

"I don't know," he rejoined, sadly shaking his head.

"I have met with so many disappointments that I can never feel sure of anything."

When we came within sight of the farm-house, John stood up in the wagon and anxiously scanned the surroundings.

"Tom."

"Well?"

"I don't believe those devilish fellows have come."

"Don't give up yet."

"I can't help it. This life is hardly worth living,"

he sadly remarked. "A man never knows when his hopes are going to be dashed to pieces."

We stopped and were unhitching the horses when a tall young fellow suddenly made his appearance.

"How are you?" said John, dropping a trace chain and eagerly scanning the young fellow.

"Ain't so mighty peart; how is it with yourself?"

"Oh, I'm kicking pretty lively. What's your name?"

"Bill Elkin."

A look of extreme gratification came over John's face as he replied:

"Can I do anything for you?"

"No, not for me in particular, but you mout do a little something for my brother Ab. Ab, he ain't been in good health for some time, an' the doctor 'lowed that a little brush o' some sort would do him good. Do you want to see him?"

"Yes, as I'm not very well myself, you may call him."

Bill Elkin, mounting a stump, put his hands on each side of his mouth and called, "Ho, Ab!"

In a moment there came a reply:

"All right!"

"Feller down here wants to see you."

"Comin'."

Ab may not have been in good health, and his physician may have advised a course of rough medicine, but there was certainly nothing about him that suggested the invalid. Tall, brawny and broad-shouldered, he was a complete picture of rugged strength.

"Air you the feller that wants me?" he asked, turning to me.

As quickly as possible I assured him that I was not, and, in an incredibly short space of time, I assured him that my respect for the Elkin family was unbounded, and that I would seek an early opportunity of proving my assertion.

"I am the man that wants you," said John.

"When do you want me? Now, or airtier supper?"

"Now," John replied. "I can't eat a bite until after I have spread my hands on you."

"Wall, I don't know that you can eat any airtier I git through with you."

Without uttering another word they stepped to one side and began to fight each other like two chickens. First one and then the other rolled on the ground. During the fight, Bill Elkin sat on the wagon tongue, paying no attention to the conflict; indeed, about the time the fight was begun he attempted to tell me a story of less than ordinary interest. The combat lasted about fifteen minutes, and when it ended, John's nose was badly skinned and Ab had lost a front tooth.

"Ready to go home, Bill?" Ab asked.

"Ain't particular. Got enough?"

"Yes, reckon I've got enough to do me a while." Then, shaking hands with John, he added, "I don't live fur from here, an' I'd like fur you to drap over some time an' see me. You can come too," addressing me.

I never saw a man improved more than John was. After eating heartily he went to bed, humming a joyous tune, and when I awoke the next morning he was out in the yard singing.

II.

THERE never was a more peaceable man than John, except when one of his spells came over him. His most commendable trait, however, was an industrial one. He was the best farm-hand I have ever seen, and he would rather get up at morning and cook breakfast than to lie in bed. This suited me. One of my peculiarities was my willingness to allow him to do the cooking. My self-denial in such matters increased his respect for me.

We saw no more of the Elkin boys until one day, about a month after the fight, old man Elkin came over and invited us to visit him. I was not disposed to go, but John finally persuaded me to accompany him. Ab and Bill, meeting us at the gate, shook hands with us as though we were old friends. The old log house was scantily, even hurriedly furnished, but everything was neat. Mrs. Elkin, an old-time woman with a hairy mole on her face, added to the welcome that had already been extended. While we were sitting in the room, pleasantly talking of the friendship which had sprung up between John and Ab upon their first meeting, a young lady made her appearance.

"This is my daughter Jack," said old Elkin.

Jack! What a name for such an attractive girl. She was not educated, but her manners were agreeable, and there was about her an air of untaught refinement which I could not help but admire. I saw immediately that John was impressed by her, and I noticed, not with a very kind feeling either, that she was disposed to smile upon him with a brightness which faded the moment she looked at me. The old man

addressed his conversation to me, thinking it a great compliment, no doubt, but I was more than willing to surrender the larger part of the attention which he showed me.

"How do you like this country?" Jack asked, as she bestowed upon John one of her brightest smiles.

"First-rate."

"You won't find much society here."

"Oh, I'll find enough for my use. I am not much of a society man."

"I am glad to hear you say so, for I don't care nothin' for it, either."

"Do you like to read?" John asked.

"Yes, if the book is interestin'."

"Have you read many books?"

"Not so powerful many, but I have read 'The Colt with Three Feet; or, the Bee that Buzzed in the Fox-tail Grass.' It's the finest thing I ever read. One feller — I forgit his name — could kill robbers as fast as they could come to him. I would love to meet such a man as that."

"Yes, such a fellow ought to be governor of the State."

"Yes, I think so," she rejoined, with much fervor.

Just then, while I was interested in the animated conversation, the old man said to me:

"Did you ever eat a coon?"

"No, sir."

"Oughter eat one. Best meat you ever seed. I was a weakly sorter man till I eat a 'coon, and then I got strong."

I ventured the remark that eating 'coon would make any one strong.

That evening, as we were returning home, John said to me:

"What do you think of Jack?"

"She is very handsome."

"I think so. In fact, I am in love with her."

I could have told him that I was too, but I didn't. One of my peculiarities is to be on the safe side.

III.

JOHN began to grow gloomy, and I knew that one of his spells was coming on him. Being in love, he fought manfully, but I could see that he was gradually yielding. One night he flounced out of bed and exclaimed:

"I can't stand this any longer."

"Where are you going?" I asked as he began to put on his clothes.

"I'm going over to see Ab Elkin."

"He's gone to bed."

"Can't help it. I've got to see him."

I accompanied him. During our walk through the dark woods, neither of us spoke a word. Arriving at Elkin's gate, John shouted for Ab.

"Who's thar?" some one asked.

"John Daybloom. Who are you?"

"Ab."

"Well, Ab, come out here a minute."

"I've got to fight you," said John when Ab came out.

"Can't you put it off till mornin'?"

"No, I've put it off as long as I can."

"Wall, I reckon I'll have to 'commodate you."

The night was so dark that I could not see much of the encounter, but the sounds that came up from the ground where the two men were rolling assured me that the battle was one of unusual vigor. After awhile they got up.

"I am ready to go," said John. "Good night, Ab."

"Good night. Come over and see us."

Occasionally, as we walked home, John would stop. Once I asked :

"What's the matter, John?"

"Nothin'. Just stopped to spit out another tooth."

When we reached home and lighted a lamp, I saw that all of John's front teeth were gone. He did not appear to regret the loss, but, attempting to whistle, he sat down and rocked himself with great satisfaction. The next morning he was up early, singing in the yard. He prepared an extra breakfast, and, although he chewed under much restraint, he very much enjoyed the meal.

IV.

FOR a time John and I, together, visited the Elkins, but after a while, receiving no encouragement, I allowed John to go alone. He did not protest, but, on the contrary, seemed willing to dispense with my company. One afternoon, while I was sitting under a tree in the woods, I saw John and Jack coming. It was

not honorable, I admit, but I kept the tree between them and me. They approached the tree and seated themselves on a log.

"Jack," said John, "I have become very much attached to you."

"No, you haven't," she replied.

"Yes, I have."

"No, you haven't."

"Have."

"Haven't."

Then they laughed.

"Jack, I couldn't get along without you."

"Yes, you could."

"No, I couldn't."

"Could."

"Couldn't."

They laughed again. Peeping from behind the tree, I saw him kiss her.

"Jack, I want you to be my wife."

"No, you don't."

"Yes, I do."

"Don't."

"Do."

They laughed and kissed each other again.

"Now, Jack, let us throw aside all joking. I have never thought much of marriage, but when I have thought of it at all, you are the kind of woman I pictured to myself. You are large and strong."

"Yes, I am as strong as my brother Ab."

"I am glad to hear that."

The following night John told me that he and Jack were engaged, and that they would soon be married.

I assumed surprise and congratulated him. The Elkins began at once to make preparations for the marriage. The old man one evening said to me:

"I wish that I had a gal for you, Tom, but the fact is, gals has always been sorter sca'ce at my house."

Everybody in the neighborhood attended the marriage. John had bought my interest in our crop, and immediately after the ceremony he took his wife home, while I sought a distant town. That was ten years ago last August. The other day, while I was sitting in my store, lamenting the hard times, a worn, wasted man entered and said:

"How are you?"

It was some time before I could realize that John stood before me.

"Why, my old friend," I exclaimed, "how are you?"

"Slow."

He sat down and for a time remained silent.

"Is your health good?" I asked.

"So so."

"Do you have any more of your spells?"

"Any more of what spells? Oh, I remember now. No, I don't have any more. The fact is, I've got the best wife in the world. She is the best medicine I ever struck. I had one spell shortly after we were married, and in ten minutes I got all the satisfaction I wanted. This left arm has been paralyzed ever since. Tom, you oughter have a wife like mine."

The Tear in the Cup.



THE TEAR IN THE CUP.

I WAS in a Southern town, standing in front of a saloon — indeed, it would have been hard to stand elsewhere, unless the inside instead of the outside of the “doggerly” had been selected — when my attention was attracted by several men who stood near. They appeared to be reminded of a good joke and were looking down the street.

“That was a great joke,” said one of the men; and I, being somewhat on the look-out for great jokes, asked:

“What joke was that?”

“Joke on old Jasper — that old fellow coming along yonder. A man that don’t know him wouldn’t see the point very well, I don’t reckon. Old fellow that edits a paper here, but he don’t amount to much; he uster be pretty well up, though — married the handsomest girl in this town a long time ago; but I guess she’s mighty tired of him.”

Old Jasper came up, and the men began to laugh.

“How are your coppers this morning?” the fellow who had been explaining to me asked. “Reckon you’d like to down a bowl this morning, wouldn’t you?”

The old man stopped, took off his hat, wiped his brow, and answered:

"You boys are privileged to guy me, I suppose. You thought you'd played a great joke on me, didn't you?"

"Come on in, old man, and have something."

"Wait," he said. "You boys got me drunk and thought it was a great joke. It was surely a very easy joke. Got me to go fishing with you and left me lying on the bank of the creek, drunk. That was a manly—a merciful joke, wasn't it? You slipped back to town and told it about the streets and laughed about it. My little boy heard you and went home and told his mother."

"Oh, what a night I passed! I was so sick that I couldn't raise my head. I heard the creek rippling with a reproachful murmur; a mocking-bird sang all night long—sang to his mate, the object of his tender care—and I, who had neglected every obligation, wished that the ground might swallow me. I dozed troublously toward morning, and when I awoke the sun was shining, and there, beside me, sat my wife, patching a pair of little trousers that she had brought with her. I did not dare to look up. I could not meet those patient eyes—eyes that told of years and years of suffering. I was burning up with thirst."

"'Mary, how long have you been here?'" I asked.

"'Nearly all night,' she answered, with a sob."

"'I am nearly dead, Mary. Won't you please bring me a drink of water?'"

"She had brought a cup with her. Ah, how well she had anticipated my wants! She went down to the creek, and I raised up and watched her as she dipped the cup into the shining stream. She came back slowly, and just before she handed me the water, she

leaned over to hide her eyes, and I saw a tear fall into the cup. I reached forth my hand—I drank the water and the tear, and, throwing down the cup, I clasped my hands and said :

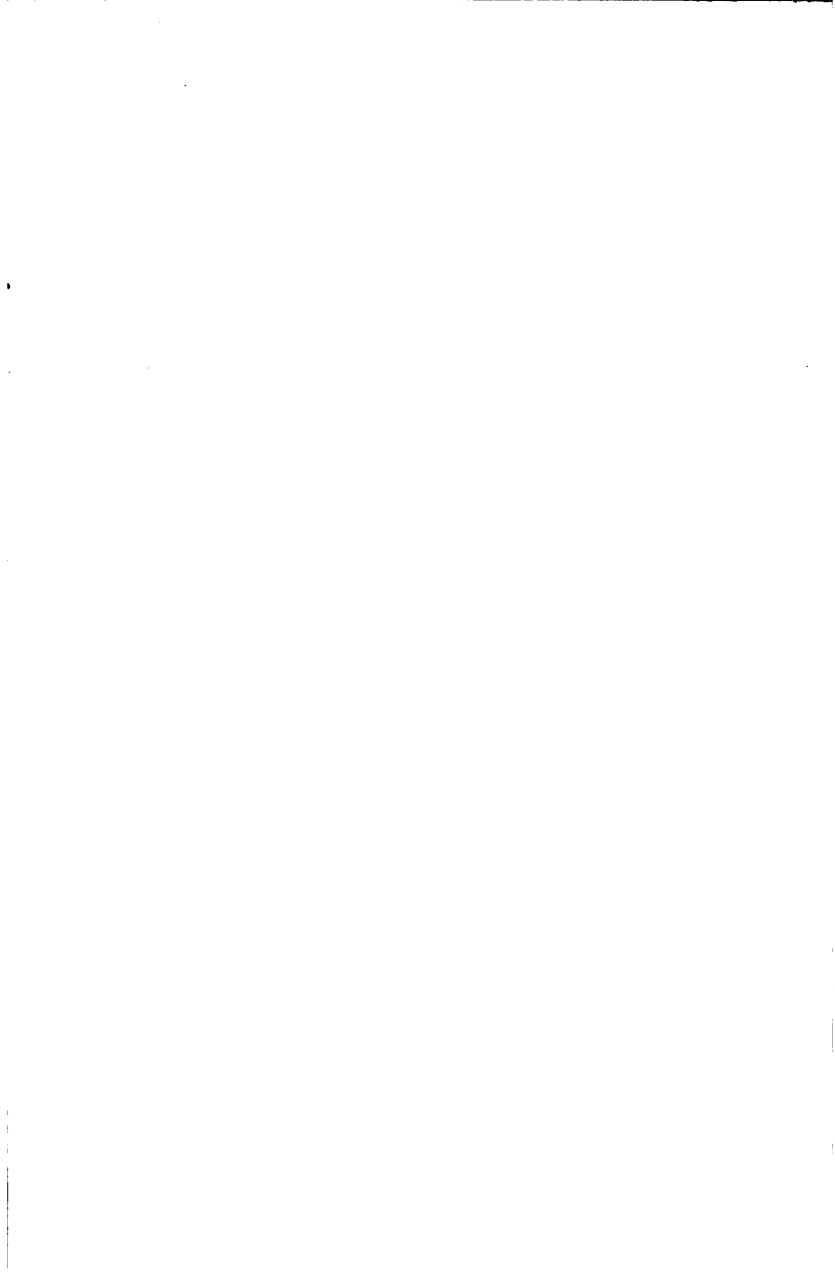
“ ‘Mary, ever since you became my wife I have been drinking your tears. I have been drinking your tears and your anguish, and I swear, in the presence of the Eternal God, that I’ll die before I ever do it again.’ ”

He put on his hat, looked at the leading joker, and said:

“ No, I will not drink with you, and I warn you to keep out of my way. Good morning.”

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